PENNY PARKER MYSTERY STORIES

SABOTEURS *on the* RIVER

by MILDRED A. WIRT

PENNY PARKER MYSTERY STORIES

By Mildred A. Wirt

Presenting a sparkling new series of stories filled with swift, compelling action and mystery by the popular, accomplished author of mystery stories – Mildred A. Wirt.

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THE SECRET PACT
THE CLOCK STRIKES THIRTEEN
THE WISHING WELL
SABOTEURS ON THE RIVER
GHOST BEYOND THE GATE

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TO PARENTS

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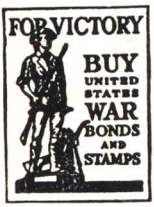

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SABOTEURS on the RIVER

WIRT

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SABOTEURS

on the

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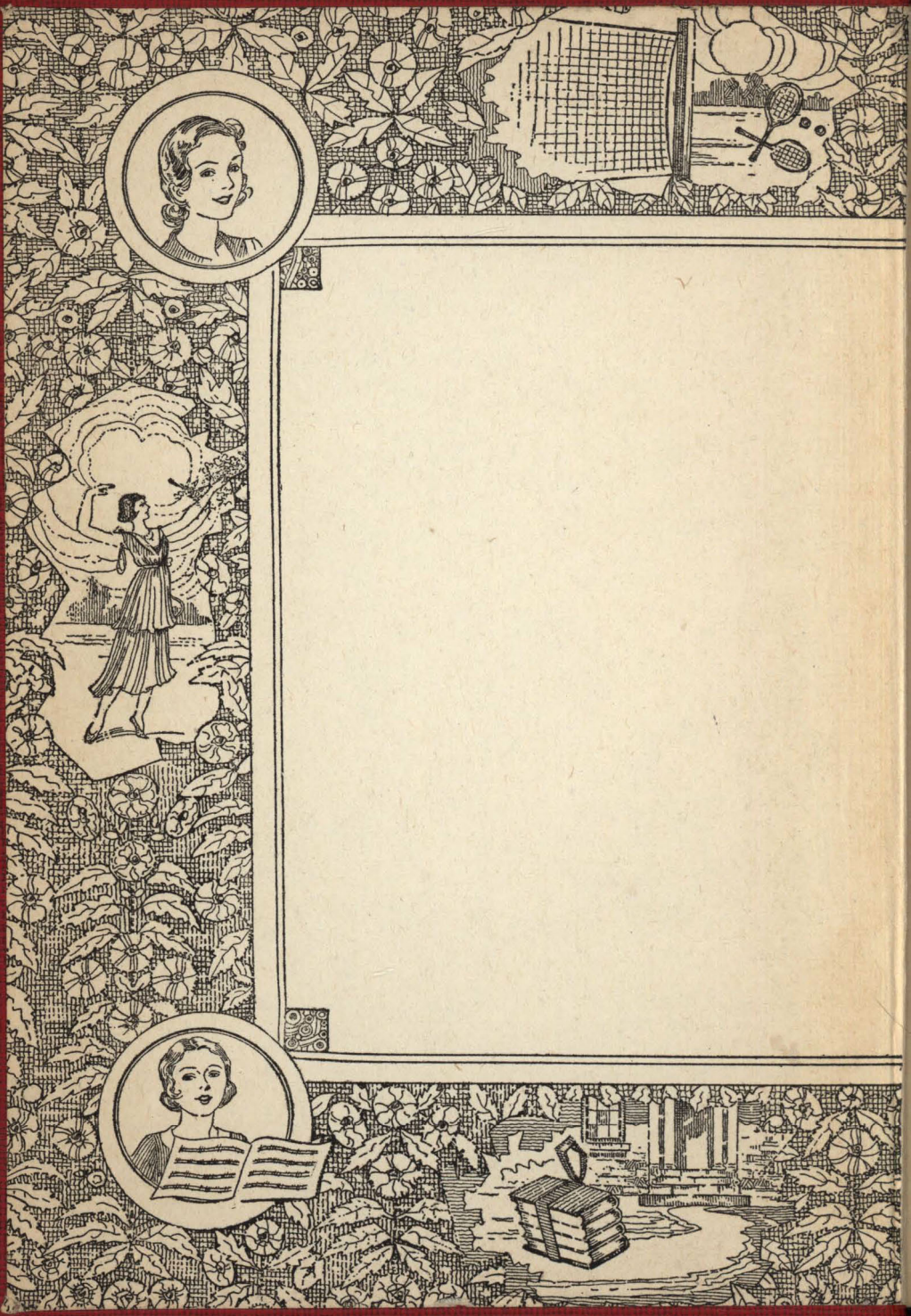
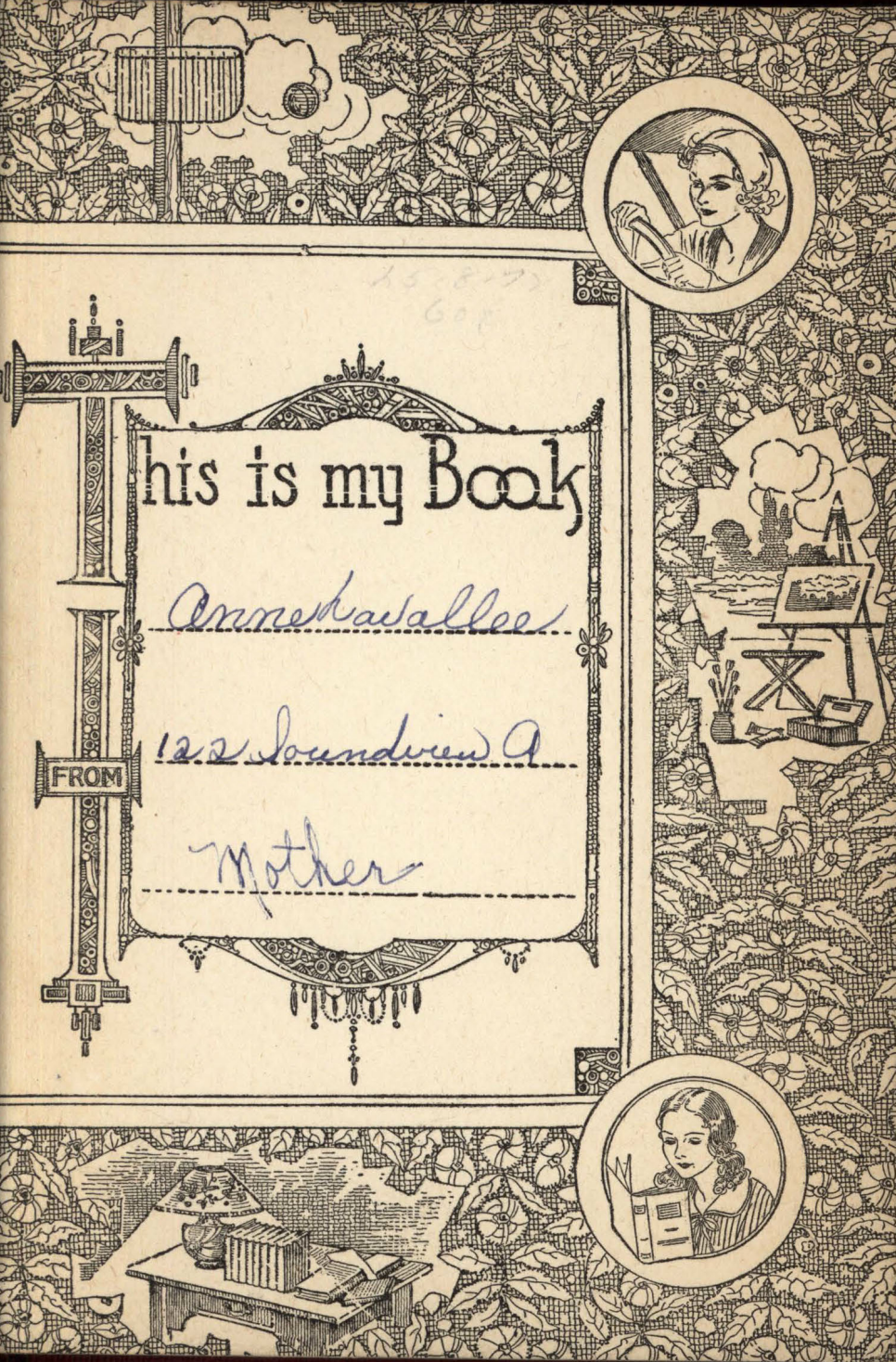
SABOTEURS *on the* RIVER

MILDRED A. WIRT




This is my Book
Anne Kavallee
FROM
122 Soundview A
Mother

"I'M GOING TO PUT MY CAMEO PIN INSIDE THIS ONE." PENNY SAID.

"Saboteurs on the River"

(See page 189)

Saboteurs on the River

By

MILDRED A. WIRT

Author of

MILDRED A. WIRT MYSTERY STORIES

PENNY PARKER MYSTERY STORIES

Illustrated

CUPPLES AND LEON COMPANY

Publishers

NEW YORK

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Saboteurs on the River

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

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PENNY PARKER

MYSTERY STORIES

TALE OF THE WITCH DOLL
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GHOST BEYOND THE GATE

Other Titles in Preparation

CHAPTER

1

TROUBLE AFLOAT

A GIRL in blue slacks, woolen sweater and tennis shoes strode jauntily along the creaking boards of the dark river dock. A large white cotton bag slung carelessly over one shoulder added to the grace of the lithe young figure.

"Hi, Penny!" called a young man who tinkered with the engine of a motorboat. "Out to bury the body?"

Penny Parker chuckled and shifted the bag to the opposite shoulder. "Just thought it would be a good night for a sail, Bill. Have you seen Louise Sidell sneaking around anywhere?"

Before the young sailor could answer, a voice shouted from the darkness, "Here I am!"

Turning her head, Penny glimpsed her chum, a chubby silhouette in the moonlight. Louise, warmly dressed, already was comfortably established in one of the small sailing boats tied up at the wharf.

"Time you're arriving," she said accusingly as

Penny tossed the sail bag into her hands. "You promised to meet me here at eight o'clock. It's at least eight-thirty now."

"Sorry, old dear." Penny leaped nimbly aboard and with practiced fingers began to put up the mainsail. "After I 'phoned you, I got hung up at home. Dishes and all that sort of thing. Then Dad delayed me ten minutes while he lectured on the undesirability of daughter taking a moonlight sail."

"I gather you gained the better of the argument," Louise grinned. "Mother made me agree to wear a life-preserver. Imagine! And there's barely enough wind stirring to whiff us across the river."

For many years Penny and Louise had been chums. Students at Riverview High School, they enjoyed the same sports, particularly swimming and sailing. The little mahogany dinghy, appropriately named "Pop's Worry," was owned by Penny's father, Anthony Parker, editor of Riverview's most enterprising newspaper, the *Star*.

Together with Mrs. Maud Weems, a housekeeper who had cared for Penny since her mother's death, he never felt entirely easy when the girls were on the river at night. Nevertheless, Penny was an excellent sailor and rather gloried in the record that her boat had overturned only once during the past season.

"All set?" she asked Louise, casting off the ropes one by one.

As Penny shoved the boat away from the dock, the flapping sail stiffened to the breeze. Louise ducked her head to avoid the swinging boom.

Bill Evans, watching from shore, called a friendly warning: "If you're planning to sail down river, better not get too close to Thompson's bridge! The new regulations say seventy-five feet."

"We'll give it a wide berth," responded Penny. She sailed the boat out through the slip into the main channel of the Big Bear river. When well beyond the dock she commented sadly: "Poor old Bill. Always giving advice. Guess he can't help it."

"His boat's just a leaky tub," replied Louise. "I hear it sunk twice while tied up to the dock. One has to feel sorry for him and treat him with kindness."

Penny steered "Pop's Worry" in a diagonal course down stream. On either side of the shore, from houses, factories, and a nearby amusement park, lights twinkled and were reflected on the unruffled surface of the water. The breeze was soft and warm; the stars seemed very close. Overhead a disc of orange moon rode lazily, now and then dodging behind a fleecy cloud.

"It's a perfect night to sail," Louise said, snuggling amid the cushions. "Wish we'd brought the phonograph along."

"Uh-huh," Penny agreed, her gaze on an approaching motorboat.

The oncoming craft showed no lights. Uncertain that the pilot would see Pop's Worry, she focused the beam of her flashlight high on the mainsail. The motorboat altered its course instantly and completely. Instead of turning only enough to avoid the sailing craft, it circled in a sharp arc and sped toward the opposite shore. There it was lost to view amid a dark fringe of trees.

"It's against the regulations to cruise without lights," Penny commented. "Wonder who piloted that boat?"

"Whoever he was, you seemed to frighten him away."

"He did turn tail when he saw my light," Penny agreed, scanning the distant shore. "I imagine the boat came from Ottman's. At least it looked like one of theirs."

Ottman's—a nautical supply shop and boat rental dock—was well known, not only to the girls, but to all sailors who plied nearby waters. Owned and operated by a brother and sister, Sara and Burt Ottman, the establishment provided canoes, sea skiffs and rowboats to all who were able to pay the hourly rate. Because many of the would-be boatmen were more venturesome than experienced, seasoned sailors were inclined to eye such pilots with distrust.

"Careful, Penny!" Louise called as she saw the mainsail begin to flap in the wind. "You're luffing!"

Reminded of her duties as steersman, Penny headed the little boat on its course once more. As the sail again became taut, she noticed a small object floating in the water directly ahead. At first she could not be certain what it was, and then she decided that it must be a corked bottle.

Deliberately Penny steered close to the object. Remarking that a bottle would create a hazard for the propellers of a motorboat, she reached to snatch it from the water. The current, however, swung it just beyond her reach.

"Bother!" she exclaimed in annoyance. "I want that bottle!"

"Oh, what do you care?" Louise demanded with a shrug. "Someone else will fish it out."

"It could do a great deal of damage. Besides, as it floated past, I thought I saw a piece of paper inside."

"If you aren't the same old Penny!" teased Louise. "Always looking for a mystery. I suppose you think yonder bottle bears a note telling where pirates buried their treasure?"

"Probably just a paper requesting: 'Please write to your lonely pen pal.' All the same, I must find out." Keeping her eye on the floating bottle, Penny skillfully brought the boat about.

"Take the tiller a minute, please," she requested her chum.

Not without misgivings, Louise reached for the long steering stick. Although she occasionally handled "Pop's Worry," she never felt confident of her ability as a sailor. An unexpected puff of wind or a sudden tilt of the boat could send her into a state of panic.

"Grab that old bottle and don't take twenty years," she urged nervously.

Penny leaned far out over the boat in an attempt to reach the bottle. Her weight tilted the light craft low into the water. Louise hastily shifted to the opposite side as a counter-balance, and in so doing, released the mainsheet. The boom promptly swung out.

Penny made a wild lunge for the running sheet, but could not prevent disaster. The end of the boom dipped into the water. As the sail became wet and heavy it slowly pulled the boat after it.

"We're going over!" Louise shrieked, scrambling for the high side.

"We are over," corrected Penny sadly.

Both girls had been tossed into the water. Louise, protected by a life preserver, immediately grasped the overturned boat and even saved her hair from getting wet. Penny, however, swam after the bobbing bottle. A moment later she came back, triumphantly hugging it against her chest.

"It's a blue pop bottle, Louise," she announced,

grasping her chum's extended hand. "And there *is* a piece of paper inside!"

"You and that stupid old bottle!" Louise retorted. "I guess it was my fault we upset, but you never should have turned the tiller over to me."

"Oh, who minds a little upset?"

"I do," Louise said crossly. "The water's cold, and we're at least a quarter of a mile from shore. No boats close by, either."

"Oh, we can get out of this by ourselves," Penny returned, undismayed. "Hold my bottle while I try to haul in the sail."

"I'd like to uncork your precious bottle and drop it to the bottom of the river!"

Nevertheless, while her chum worked with the halyard, Louise held tightly to the little object which had caused all the trouble. Neither in shape nor size was the bottle unusual, but the paper it contained did arouse her curiosity. Though she never would have admitted it, she too wondered if it might bear an interesting message.

After pulling in the heavy, water-soaked sail, the girls climbed to the high side of the boat, trying by their combined weight to right it. Time and again they failed. At last, breathless, cold, discouraged, they admitted that the task was beyond their strength.

"Let's shout for help," Louise proposed, anxiously watching the distant shore lights.

"All right," agreed Penny, "but I doubt anyone will hear us. My, we're drifting down river fast!"

Decidedly worried, the girls shouted many times. There were no boats near, not even the motor craft they had observed a few minutes earlier. The swift current seemed to be swinging them directly toward Thompson's bridge.

"A watchman always is on guard there night and day," Penny commented, scanning the arching structure of steel. "If the old fellow isn't asleep he should see us as we drift by."

Louise was too cold and miserable to answer. However, she rather unwillingly held the blue bottle while Penny swam and tried to guide the overturned boat toward shore.

When the girls were fairly close to the bridge, they began to shout once more. Although they could see automobiles moving to and fro across the great archway, no one became aware of their plight.

Then as they despaired, there came an answering shout from above. A powerful beam of light played over the water, cutting a bright path.

"Help! Help!" screamed Louise, waving an arm.

"Halt or I'll fire!" rang out the terse command from the bridge.

"Halt?" cried Penny, too exasperated to consider the significance of the order. "That's what we'd like to do, but we can't!"

The searchlight came to rest on the overturned sailboat. The girls were so blinded that for a moment they could see nothing. Then the searchlight shifted slightly to the left, and they were able to distinguish a short, stoop-shouldered man who peered over the railing of the bridge. Apparently satisfied that their plight was genuine, he called reassuringly:

"Okay, take it easy. I'll heave you a line."

The watchman disappeared into the little bridge house. Soon he reappeared, and with excellent aim, tossed a weighted rope so that it fell squarely across the overturned boat. Penny seized an end and made it fast.

"I'll try to pull you in," the watchman shouted. "Just hang on."

Leaving his post on the bridge, the old fellow climbed down a steep incline to the muddy shore. By means of the long rope, he slowly and laboriously pulled the water-logged boat with the clinging girls toward a quiet cove.

Once within wading depth, the chums aided the watchman by leading the craft in. Together the three of them beached "Pop's Worry" on a narrow strip of sand.

"Thanks," Penny gasped, flipping a wet curl from off her freckled nose. "On second thought, many, many thanks."

"You've no business to get so close to the bridge,"

the watchman retorted. "It's agin' the regulations. I could have you arrested."

"But it wasn't our fault this old sailboat upset," Penny returned reasonably. "We were reaching for a floating bottle—oh, my Aunt! Where is that bottle, Louise? Don't tell me we've lost it!"

Her chum was given no opportunity to reply, for at that moment a motorboat roared down the river at high speed. Its throttle was wide open, and it appeared to be racing straight toward the bridge.

"Halt!" shouted the watchman, jerking a weapon from a leather holster. "Halt!"

The pilot did not obey the command. Instead, to the amazement of the watchers, he leaped from the cockpit and swam for the opposite shore. Twice the watchman fired at him, but the bullets were well above the swimmer's head.

The unpiloted boat, its helm securely lashed, drove straight on its course.

"It's going to strike the bridge!" shouted Louise.

As the boat raced head on into one of the massive concrete piers, there came a deafening explosion. The entire steel structure of the bridge seemed to recoil from the impact. Girders shivered and shook, cables rattled. On the eastern approach, brakes screamed as automobiles were brought to a sudden halt.

"Saboteurs!" the watchman cried hoarsely. "They've done it—dynamited the bridge!"

CHAPTER

2

FRONT PAGE NEWS

ALTHOUGH ONE of the main concrete piers had been damaged by the explosion, the approaches to the bridge remained intact. Several automobiles drew up at the curbing, but others, their drivers unaware of what had caused the blast, sped on across.

From their position beneath the bridge, Louise, Penny, and the watchman could see the entire steel structure quiver. The underpinning had been weakened, but whether or not it was safe for traffic to proceed, only an engineer could determine.

"Oughtn't we stop the cars?" Penny demanded, for the watchman seemed stunned by what had happened. His eyes were fixed on the opposite shore, at a point amid the trees where the pilot of the motorboat had crawled from the water.

"Yes, yes," he muttered, bringing his attention once more to the bridge. "No chance to catch that saboteur now. We must stop the autos."

Shouting as he ran, the watchman scrambled up the steep slope to the western approach of the bridge. Realizing that he would be unable to cope with traffic moving from two directions, the girls hesitated, and then decided to help him. Their wet shoes provided poor traction on the hill. Slipping, sliding, clothing plastered to their bodies, they reached the bridge level.

"You hold the cars at this end!" ordered the watchman as he glimpsed them. "I'll lower the gate at the other side!"

Stationing themselves at the entrance to the bridge, Louise and Penny forced motorists to halt at the curb. Within a minute or two, a long line had formed.

"What's wrong?" demanded one irate driver. "An accident?"

"Bridge damaged," Penny replied tersely.

All along the line horns began to toot. A few of the more curious motorists alighted and came to bombard the girls with questions. In the midst of the excitement, one of the cars broke out of line and crept to the very end of the pavement.

"Listen, Mister," Penny began indignantly to the driver. "You'll have to back up. You can't cross—" she broke off as she recognized the man at the wheel. "Dad! Well, for Pete's sake!"

"Penny!" the newspaper man exclaimed, no less dumbfounded. "What are you and Louise doing here? And in those wet clothes?"

"Policing the bridge. Dad, there's a big story for you here! A saboteur just blew up one of the piers by ramming it with a motorboat!"

"I thought I heard an explosion as I was driving down Clark Street!" exclaimed Mr. Parker. Opening the car door, he leaped out and wrapped his overcoat about Penny's shivering shoulders. "Now tell me exactly what happened."

As calmly as they could, the girls reported how the saboteur had dynamited the bridge.

"This *is* a front page story!" the newspaper owner cried jubilantly. "Penny, you and Louise take my car and scoot for home. When you get there call the *Star* office. Have Editor DeWitt send a reporter to help me—Jerry Livingston, if he's around. We'll need a crack photographer too—Salt Sommers."

"I can get the call through much quicker by running to the drugstore." Penny jerked her head toward a cluster of buildings not far from the bridge entrance. "As for going home at a moment like this, never!"

"So you want a case of pneumonia?" Mr. Parker barked. "How'd you get wet anyhow?"

"Sailboat," Penny answered briefly. She took the car keys from her father, and pressed them upon Louise.

"But I don't want to go if you don't," her chum argued.

"You're more susceptible to pneumonia than I am," Penny said, giving her a little push. "Dash on home, and get into warm, dry clothing. And don't forget to take off that life preserver before you hop into bed!"

Thus urged, Louise reluctantly backed Mr. Parker's car to the main street, and drove away.

"Now I'll slosh over to the drugstore and call the *Star* office," Penny offered briskly. "Lend me a nickel, Dad."

"I'm crazy as an eel to let you stay," Mr. Parker muttered, fumbling in his pocket for a coin. "You should have gone with Louise."

"Let's argue about that tomorrow, Dad. Right now we must work fast unless we want other newspapers to scoop us on this story."

While her father remained behind to direct bridge traffic, Penny ran to the nearest drugstore. Darting into the one telephone booth ahead of an astonished woman customer, she called Editor DeWitt of the *Star*. Tersely she relayed her father's orders.

"Jerry and Salt will be out there in five minutes," DeWitt promised. "Now what can you give us on the explosion? Did you witness it?"

"Did I?" echoed Penny. "Why, I practically caused it!"

With no further encouragement, she launched into a vivid, eye-witness account of the bridge dynamit-

ing. As she talked, a re-write man on another telephone, took down everything she reported.

"Now about the saboteur's motorboat," he said as she finished. "Can you give us a description of it?"

"Not a very good one," Penny admitted. "It looked like one of Ottman's rented boats with an outboard attached. In fact, Louise and I saw a similar craft earlier in the evening which was cruising not far from the bridge."

"Then you think the saboteur may have rented his boat from Ottmans?"

"Well, it's a possibility."

"You've given us some good stuff!" the rewrite man praised. "DeWitt's getting out an extra. Shoot us any new facts as soon as you can."

"Dad's on the job full blast," Penny answered. "He'll soon have all the details for you."

Slamming out of the telephone booth, she ran back to the bridge. Her father no longer directed traffic, but had turned the task over to a pompous motorist who thoroughly enjoyed his authority.

"You can't cross, young lady," he said as she sought to pass him. "Bridge's unsafe."

"I'm a reporter for the *Star*," Penny replied confidently.

The man stared at her bedraggled clothing. "A reporter?" he inquired dubiously.

Just then a police car, its siren shrilling, sped up to

the bridge. Close behind came another car which bore a printed card "*Star*" on its windshield. It braked to a standstill nearby and out leaped two young men, Jerry Livingston and Salt Sommers.

"Hello, Penny!" Jerry greeted her. "Might have known you'd be here. Where's the Chief?"

"Somewhere, sleuthing around," Penny answered. "I lost him a minute ago when I telephoned the *Star* office."

Salt Sommers, a felt hat cocked low over his eyes, began unloading photographic equipment from the coupe.

"Where'll I get the best shots?" he asked Penny. "Other side or this?"

"Under the bridge," she directed crisply. "None of the damage shows from above."

Salt slung the heavy camera over his shoulder, and disappeared down the incline which led to the river bed.

Before Jerry and Penny could move away, Mr. Parker hurried up with the watchman in tow.

"This is Carl Oaks, bridge guard," he announced without preliminary. "Take him over to the drug-store, Jerry, and put him on the wire. We want his complete story for the *Star*."

"Not so fast," drawled a voice from behind. "We want to talk to Carl Oaks."

One of the policemen, a detective, moved over to the group and began to question the watchman.

"It wasn't my fault the bridge was dynamited," the old fellow whined. "I shouted at the boatman and fired twice."

"He got away?"

"Yeah. Jumped overboard before the boat struck the pier. Last I saw of him, he was climbing out of the river on the other shore."

"At what point?"

"Right over there." The watchman indicated a clump of maples beyond the far side of the bridge. "I could see him plainly from the beach."

"And what were *you* doing on the beach?" questioned the detective sharply.

"Ask her," Carl Oaks muttered, eyeing Penny.

"Mr. Oaks helped my friend and me when our sailboat upset," she supported his story. "It really wasn't his fault that he was away from his post at the time of the explosion."

Both Penny and the watchman were questioned at considerable length by the detective. Meanwhile, other officers were searching for the escaped saboteur. Several members of the squad went beneath the bridge to inspect the damage and collect shattered sections of the wrecked boat.

Dismissed at last by the detective, Penny, her father

and Jerry crossed the bridge to join in the search. Carl Oaks, whose answers did not entirely satisfy police, was detained for further questioning.

"Penny, tell me more about this fellow Oaks," Mr. Parker urged his daughter. "I suppose he did his best to stop the saboteur?"

"It seemed so to me," Penny replied slowly. "He was a miserable marksman, though. I guess he must have been excited when he fired."

Following a trail of moving lights, the trio soon came to a group of policemen who were examining footprints in the mud of the river bank.

"This is where the saboteur got away," Penny whispered to her father. "Do you suppose the fellow is still hiding in the woods?"

"Not likely," Mr. Parker answered. "A job of this sort would be planned in every detail."

The newspaper owner's words were borne out a few minutes later when a policeman came upon a clump of bushes where an automobile had stood. Grass was crushed, a small patch of oil was visible, and the soft earth showed tire imprints.

Penny, her father and Jerry, did not remain long in the vicinity. Satisfied that the saboteur had made his get-away by car, they were eager to report their findings to the *Star* office.

Mr. Parker telephoned DeWitt and then joined the

others at the press car. As Salt Sommers climbed aboard with his camera, an automobile bearing a *News* windshield sticker, skidded to a stop nearby.

"Too bad, boys," Salt taunted the rival photographers. "Better late than never!"

Already news vendors were crying the *Star's* first extra. Once well away from the bridge, Mr. Parker stopped the car to buy a paper.

"Nice going," he declared in satisfaction as he scanned the big black headlines. "We beat every other Riverview paper by a good margin. A colorful story, too."

"Thanks to whom?" demanded Penny, giving him a pinch.

"I suppose I should say, to you," he admitted with a grin. "However, I see you've already received ample credit. DeWitt gave you a by-line."

"Did he really?" Penny took the paper from her father's hand and gazed affectionately at her own name in print. "Nice of him. Especially when I didn't even suggest the idea."

To a newspaper reporter, a story tagged with his own name means high honor. Many times Penny, ever alert for news, had enjoyed the satisfaction of seeing her stories appear with a by-line. Early in her career as a self-made newspaper girl, her contributions had been regarded as something of an annoyance

to her father and the staff of the *Star*. But of late she had turned in many of the paper's best scoops and incidentally, had solved a few mysteries.

"This is the way I like a story written," Mr. Parker declared, reading aloud from the account which bore his daughter's name. "No flowery phrases. Just a straight version of how your sailboat upset and what you saw as it floated down toward the bridge."

"It's a pretty drab account if you ask me," sniffed Penny. "I could have written it up much better myself. Why, the re-write man didn't even tell how Louise and I happened to upset!"

"A detail of no importance," Mr. Parker returned. "I mean, in connection with the story," he corrected hastily as Penny flashed him an injured look. "What did cause you to capsize?"

"A blue bottle, Dad. It had a piece of paper inside. I was reaching for it and—oh, my aunt!"

"Now what?" demanded her father.

"Turn the car around and drive back to the bridge!"

"Drive back? Why?"

"I've lost that blue bottle," Penny fairly wailed. "Louise had it, but I know she didn't take it home with her. It must be lying somewhere on the beach near our stranded sailboat. Oh, please Dad, turn back!"

CHAPTER

3

STRAIGHT FROM THE SHOULDER

MR. PARKER did not slacken the speed of the car. Relaxing somewhat, he edged farther away from Penny, whose sodden garments were oozing water.

"A bottle!" he exclaimed. "Penny, for a minute you had me worried. I thought you meant something important."

"But Dad, the bottle is important," she argued earnestly. "You see, it contains a folded piece of paper, and I'm sure it must be a message."

"Of all the idiotic things! At a time like this when you should be worried about your health, you plague me about a silly bottle. We're going straight home."

"Oh, all right," Penny accepted the decision with a shrug. "Nevertheless, I'm curious about that bottle, and I mean to find it tomorrow!"

Mr. Parker dropped Jerry and Salt off at the newspaper plant and then drove on to his home. The house, a modern two-story dwelling, was situated on

a terrace overlooking the river. Lights glowed from the living room windows and Mrs. Weems, the stout housekeeper, could be seen hovering over the radio.

"I was just listening to the news about the dynamiting," she remarked as Mr. Parker and his daughter came in from the kitchen. Turning her head, she stared at the girl's bedraggled hair and wet clothing. "Why, Penny Parker!"

"I guess I *am* a little bit moist," Penny admitted with a grin. Sitting down on the davenport, she began to strip off her shoes and stockings.

"Not here!" Mrs. Weems protested. "Take a hot shower while I fix you a warm drink. Oh, I knew you shouldn't have gone sailing at night."

"But Mrs. Weems—"

"Scoot right up to the bathroom and get out of those wet clothes!" the housekeeper interrupted. "You'll be lucky if you don't come down with your death o' cold."

Carrying a shoe in either hand, Penny wearily climbed the stairs. By the time she had finished under the shower, Mrs. Weems appeared with a glass of hot lemonade.

"Drink this," she commanded sternly. "Then get into bed and I'll fix you up with the hot water bag."

"But I'm not sick," Penny grumbled.

"You will be tomorrow," the housekeeper pre-

dicted. "Your father told me how he allowed you to stay at the bridge while police searched for the saboteur. I declare, I don't know what he was thinking of!"

"Dad and I are a couple of tough old news hawks," Penny chuckled. "Well, I suppose I'll have to compromise with you."

"Compromise?" Mrs. Weems asked suspiciously.

"I'll drink the lemonade if you'll let me skip the hot water bottle."

"Indeed not," Mrs. Weems returned firmly. "Now jump into bed, and no more arguments."

Although Penny considered the housekeeper entirely too thorough in her methods, she enjoyed the pleasant warmth of the bed. She drank the lemonade, submitted to the hot water bottle, and then snuggling down, slept soundly. When she awakened, sunlight streamed in through the Venetian blinds. Cocking an eye at the dresser clock, she saw to her dismay that it was ten o'clock.

"My Aunt!" she exclaimed, leaping out of bed. "All this good time wasted!"

With the speed of a trained fireman, Penny wriggled into her clothes. She gave her auburn hair a quick brush but took time to slap a little polish on her saddle shoes before bounding down the stairs to the kitchen.

"Is that you or a gazelle escaped from the zoo?" inquired Mrs. Weems who was washing dishes at the sink.

"Why didn't you bounce me out of bed two hours ago?" asked Penny. "I have an important business engagement for this morning."

"You're not going to the river again, I hope!"

"Oh, but I must, Mrs. Weems." Penny opened the refrigerator and helped herself to a bowl of strawberries and a Martha Washington pie.

"You're not breakfasting on that," said the housekeeper, taking the dishes away from her. "Oatmeal is what you need. Now why must you go to the river?"

"Someone has to salvage the sailboat. Besides, I lost a valuable object last night—"

The telephone jingled, and Penny darted off to answer it. As she had anticipated, the call was from Louise Sidell, who in a very husky voice asked her how she was feeling.

"Fit as a fiddle and ready to go bottle hunting!" Penny replied promptly. "And you?"

"I hurt in all the wrong places," Louise complained. "What a night!"

"Why, I enjoyed every minute of it," Penny said with sincerity. "If you're such a wreck I suppose you won't care to go with me to the river this morning. By the way, what did you do with that blue bottle?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. I'm sure I had it in my hand when we reached shore, but that's the last I remember."

"Well, never mind, if it's anywhere on the beach I'll find it," Penny said. "Sure you don't want to tag along?"

"Maybe I will."

"Then meet me in twenty minutes at Ottman's dock. Signing off now to gobble a bowl of oatmeal."

Without giving Louise a chance to change her mind, Penny hung up the receiver and returned to the kitchen. After fortifying herself with oatmeal, a glass of orange juice, bacon, two rolls and sundry odds and ends, she started off to meet Louise. Her chum, looking none too cheerful, awaited her near Ottman's dock.

"Why did you ask me to meet you at this particular place, Penny?" she inquired. "It was a block out of my way."

"I thought we might rent one of Ottman's boats and row down to the bridge. It will be easier than walking along the mud flats."

"You think of everything," Louise said admiringly. "But where's the proprietor of this place?"

Boats of all description were fastened along the dock, but neither Burt Ottman nor his sister were visible. Not far from a long shed which served as ticket office and canoe-storage house, an empty dou-

ble-deck motor launch had been tied to a pier. An aged black and white dog drowsed on its sunny deck.

"Guess the place is deserted," Penny commented. After wandering about, she sat down on an overturned row boat which had been pulled out near the water's edge.

The boat moved beneath her, and an irate voice rumbled: "Would you mind getting off?"

Decidedly startled, Penny sprang to her feet.

As the boat was pushed over on its side, a girl in grimy slacks, rolled from beneath it. Barely twenty years of age, her skin was rough and brown from constant exposure to wind and sun. A smear of varnish decorated one cheek and she held a can of caulking material in her hand.

"I'm sorry," said Penny, smiling. "Do you live under that boat?"

Sara Ottman's dark eyes flashed. Getting to her feet, she regarded the girl with undisguised hostility.

"Very clever, aren't you!" she said scathingly. "In fact, quite the little joker!"

"Why, I didn't mean anything," Penny apologized. "I had no idea you were working under that thing."

"So clever, and such a marvelous detective," Sara went on, paying no heed. "Why, it was Penny Parker who not so long ago astonished Riverview by solving the Mystery of the Witch Doll! And who but Penny aided the police in trailing The Vanishing

Houseboat? It was our own Penny who learned why the tower Clock Struck Thirteen. And now we are favored with her most valuable opinion in connection with the bridge dynamiting case!"

Penny and Louise were dumbfounded by the sudden, unwarranted attack. By no stretch of the imagination could they think that Sara Ottman meant her words as a joke. But what had her so aroused? While it was true that Penny had solved many local mysteries, she never had been boastful of her accomplishments. In fact, she was one of the most popular girls in Riverview.

"Are you sure you haven't a fever, Miss Ottman?" Penny demanded, her own eyes blazing. "I certainly fail to understand such an outburst."

"Of course you do," the other mocked. "You're not used to talk coming straight from the shoulder. Why are you here anyhow?"

"To rent a boat."

"Well, you can't have one," Sara Ottman said shortly. "And if you never come around here again, it will be soon enough."

Glaring once more at Penny, she turned and strode into the boathouse.

CHAPTER

4

AN UNWARRANTED ATTACK

"NOW WILL you tell me what I did to deserve a crack like that?" Penny muttered as the door of the boathouse slammed behind Sara Ottman.

"Not a single thing," Louise answered loyally. "She just rolled out from beneath that boat with a dagger between her teeth!"

"I guess I am a little prig, Lou."

"You're no such thing!" Louise grasped her arm and gave her an affectionate squeeze. "Come along and forget it. I never did like Sara Ottman anyhow."

Penny allowed herself to be led away from the dock, but the older girl's unkind remarks kept pricking her mind. Although occasionally in the past she had stopped for a few minutes at the Ottman place, she never before had spoken a dozen words to Sara. Nearly all of her business dealings had been with Burt Ottman, a pleasant young man who had painted her father's sailboat that spring.

"I simply can't understand it," Penny mumbled, trudging along the shore with Louise. "The last time I saw Sara she spoke to me politely enough. I must have offended her, but how?"

"Oh, why waste any thought on her?" Louise scoffed.

"Because it bothers me. She mentioned the bridge dynamiting affair. Maybe it was my by-line story in the *Star* that offended her."

"What did it say?" Louise inquired curiously. "I didn't see the morning paper."

"Neither did I. I gave my story to a rewrite man over the telephone. I meant to read the entire account, but was in a hurry to get over here, so I skipped it."

"Well, I shouldn't worry about the matter if I were you."

"I'm sure the boat used in the dynamiting came from Ottman's," Penny declared, thinking aloud. "Perhaps Sara is just out of sorts because she and her brother lost their property."

Making their way along the mud flats, the girls came at last to the tiny stretch of sand where the sailboat had been beached the previous night. It lay exactly as they had left it, cockpit half filled with water, the tall mast nosed into the loose sand.

"What a mess," sighed Penny. "Well, the first

thing to do is to get the wet sail off. We should have taken care of it last night."

Before beginning the task, the girls wandered toward the nearby bridge to inspect the damage caused by dynamiting. An armed soldier refused to allow them to approach closer than twenty yards. All traffic had been halted, and a group of engineers could be seen examining the shattered pier.

"Is Mr. Oaks around here?" Penny asked the soldier.

"Oaks? Oh, you mean the bridge watchman. He's been charged with neglect of duty, and relieved of his job."

Penny and Louise were sorry to hear the news, feeling that in a way they were responsible for the old fellow having left his post. Unable to learn whether or not the watchman was being detained by police, they returned to the beach to salvage their sailboat.

Without a pump, it was a difficult task to remove the water from the cockpit of "Pop's Worry." By rocking the boat back and forth and scooping with an old tin can, the girls finally got most of it out.

"We'll have to dry the sail somehow or it will mildew," Penny decided. "The best thing, I think, is to put it on again and sail home."

Together they righted the boat. As the tall mast

flipped out of the sand, Penny caught glimpse of a shiny, blue object.

"Our bottle!" she cried triumphantly, making a dive for it.

"Your bottle," corrected Louise. "I'm not a bit interested in that silly old thing."

Nevertheless, as Penny sat down on the deck of "Pop's Worry" and removed the cork, she edged nearer. By means of a hairpin, the folded sheet of paper contained within was pulled from the narrow neck. Highly elated, Penny spread out the message to read.

"Well, what does it say?" Louise inquired impatiently.

"Oh, so you are interested," teased Penny.

"Now don't try to be funny! Read the message."

Penny stared at the paper in her hand. "It's rather queer," she acknowledged. "Listen:

" '*The day of the Great Deluge approaches. If you would be saved from destruction, seek without delay, the shelter of my ark.*' "

"If that isn't nonsense!" Louise exclaimed, peering over her chum's shoulder. "And the note is signed, '*Noah.*' "

"Someone's idea of a joke, I suppose," Penny replied. She tossed the paper away, then reconsidering, retrieved the message and with the bottle, placed it

in the cockpit of the boat. "Well, it's rained a lot this Spring, but I don't think we'll have to worry about the Great Deluge."

"Noah was a Biblical character," Louise commented thoughtfully. "I remember that when God told him it would rain forty days and forty nights, he built an ark to resist the flood waters. And he took his family in with him and all the animals, two by two."

"Noah was a bit before our time," laughed Penny. "Suppose we shove off for home."

By dint of much physical exertion, the girls pushed "Pop's Worry" out into the shallow water. Penny, who had removed shoes and stockings, gave a final thrust and leaped lightly aboard. Raising the wet sail, she allowed it to flap loosely in the wind.

"We'll have everything snug and dry by the time we reach home," she declared confidently. "Tired, Lou?"

"A little," admitted her chum, stretching out full length on the deck. "I like to sail but I don't like to bail! And just think, if you hadn't been so crazy to get that blue bottle, we'd have spared ourselves a lot of hard work."

"Well, a fellow never knows. The bottle might have provided the first clue in an absorbing mystery! Who do you suppose wrote such an odd message?"

"How should I know?" yawned Louise. "Probably some prankster."

Taking a zigzag course, "Pop's Worry" tacked slowly upstream. Whipped by a brisk wind, the wet sail gradually dried and regained its former shape.

As the boat presently approached Ottman's dock, both girls turned to gaze in that direction. Sara could be seen moving about on one of the floating platforms, retying several boats which banged at their moorings.

"Better tack," Louise advised in a low tone. "We don't want to get too close."

Penny acted as if she had not heard. She made no move to bring the boat about.

"We'll end up right at Ottman's unless you're careful," Louise warned. "Or is that what you want to do?"

"I'm thinking about it." Penny watched Sara with thoughtful eyes.

"Well, if you'll deliberately go there again, I must say you enjoy being insulted!"

"I'd like to find out why Sara is angry at me. If it's only a misunderstanding I want to clear it up."

Louise shook her head sadly but offered no further protest as the boat held to its course. Not until the craft grated gently against one of the floats at Ottman's did Sara seem to note the girls' approach. Glancing up from her work, she stared at them, and then deliberately looked away.

"The air's still chilly," Penny remarked in an undertone. "Well, we'll see."

Making "Pop's Worry" fast to a spar, she walked across the float to confront Sara.

"Miss Ottman," she began quietly, "if I've done anything to offend you, I wish to apologize."

Sara turned slowly to face Penny. "You owe me no apology," she said in a cold voice.

"Then why do you dislike me? I always thought I was welcome around here until today. My father has given you considerable business."

"I'm sorry I spoke to you the way I did," Sara replied stiffly and with no warmth. "It was rude of me."

"But why am I such poison?" Penny persisted. "What have I done?"

"You *honestly* don't know?"

"Why, of course not. I shouldn't be asking if I did."

Sara stared at Penny as if wondering whether or not to accept her remarks as sincere.

"Do you only write for the papers?" she asked, a slight edge to her voice. "You never read them?"

"I don't know what you mean." Penny was truly bewildered. "Has this misunderstanding something to do with the bridge dynamiting?"

Sara nodded her head grimly. "It has," she agreed. "Didn't you see the morning paper?"

"Why, no."

"Then wait a minute." Sara turned and vanished

into the boat shed. A moment later she reappeared, carrying a copy of the *Star*.

"Read that," she directed, thrusting the black headlines in front of Penny's eyes. "Now do you understand why I feel that you're no friend of mine?"

CHAPTER

5

HELD ON SUSPICION

PENNY GAZED at the *Riverview Star's* front page headline which proclaimed:

"BURT OTTMAN ARRESTED AS SUSPECT IN BRIDGE DYNAMITING."

The opening paragraph of the news story, was even more dismaying. It began:

"Acting upon information provided by Miss Penelope Parker, police today arrested Burt Ottman, owner of the Ottman Boat Dock, charging him with participation in the Friday night dynamiting of Thompson's bridge."

Penny hastily scanned the remainder of the story and then protested: "But I never even mentioned your brother's name to police, Miss Ottman! Why, I certainly didn't think that he had any connection with the dynamiting."

"You certainly didn't think, period," Sara replied, though in a less severe tone. "You told police that

the motorboat used in the dynamiting was one of our boats."

"Well, it looked like it to me. Perhaps I was mistaken."

"You weren't mistaken. The boat definitely was one of ours. It was stolen from here about a month ago."

Penny drew a deep breath. "Then in that case, I don't see why suspicion should fall upon your brother."

"Didn't you tell police that a young man corresponding to his description was handling the boat?"

"Indeed I didn't."

"Then it must have been the watchman who provided the description," Sara corrected. "At any rate, police identified the boat as ours, and arrested Burt. They have him at the station now."

"It never occurred to me that anyone would suspect your brother," Penny said soberly. "Why, everyone along the river knows him well. It should be easy for him to prove his innocence."

"True, it should be," Sara replied bitterly. "The arrest angered Burt, and he made matters worse by refusing to answer questions the police asked him."

"Oh, that was a mistake."

"Yes, but Burt has a great deal of pride. The police never should have arrested him."

"I certainly agree with you," declared Penny, for

she could not envision young Ottman as a saboteur. "Can't your brother prove where he was last night at the time of the explosion?"

"That's just it." Sara looked troubled as she reached to take the newspaper. "He refuses to offer any alibi."

"But you must know yourself where your brother spent his time."

"I wish I did. He left here about seven o'clock and didn't return home until early this morning—just a half hour before the police came to arrest him."

"Oh!"

"All the same, Burt had no connection with the dynamiting," Sara said quickly. "He frequently stays out late at night. I've never questioned him, for it was none of my affair."

Penny scarcely knew what to reply. "I can understand now why you're provoked at me," she said after a moment. "But I assure you I had no intention of involving your brother with the police. I certainly never gave them his description."

Sara smiled and in a charming gesture extended her hand.

"I'm sorry I talked as I did to you," she apologized. "Forget it, will you?"

"Of course," Penny agreed generously. "And if there's anything I can do to help—"

The float creaked and both girls turned to see Bill Evans coming toward them.

"Hi!" he greeted the girls impartially. "Miss Ottman, wonder if I can get you to help me?"

"I suppose you're having trouble with that motor of yours again," sighed Sara. "Or should I say yet?"

"I've lost it in the river," Bill confessed sheepishly. "Blamed thing cost me sixty dollars second-hand too!"

"In the river!" gasped Penny. "What did you do, get peeved and toss it overboard?"

The saddened young man shook his head. "Guess I didn't have it fastened on very well. Anyhow, just as I was leaving the dock, off she fell into about ten feet of water."

"I hope you buoyed the spot," said Sara.

"Yes, I marked it with a floating can. Some of the boys have been trying to get 'er up for me, but no luck. If you can do it, I'll pay five dollars."

"Well, I'm pretty busy," Miss Ottman said in a harassed voice. "Burt's not here and it keeps me jumping to run the launch and rent the canoes. But I'll see what I can do this afternoon."

"Thanks," Bill replied gratefully, turning away. "Thanks a lot."

When the young man was beyond hearing distance, Penny spoke again of Burt Ottman's unfortunate arrest.

"I'm sorry about everything, Miss Ottman," she said earnestly. "If you wish, I'll talk to the police and assure them that so far as I know, the saboteur did not resemble your brother. It was too dark for me to really see him."

"I'll feel very grateful if you will speak a good word for Burt," Sara responded. She sank down on an overturned bucket and pressed a hand to her temple. "Oh, my head's splitting! Everything's been coming at me so fast. The police were here questioning me and they twisted my remarks all around. I'll have to raise bail for Burt, but where the money is coming from I don't know."

The last of Penny's resentment toward the girl faded away. From the jerky way Sara spoke, she knew that her thoughts were darting from one perplexing problem to another.

"I don't know what I'm doing or saying today," Sara said miserably. "If you can forgive me—"

"Of course! I don't blame you a bit for speaking to me the way you did. May I borrow a sponge for a minute?"

Sara smiled and nodded. Eager to make amends, she ran into the shed and returned with the desired article.

"There's still a little water in my boat," Penny explained. "Thought I'd sop it up."

"Let me do it," Sara offered. Without waiting for

permission she went to the sailboat, and with a friendly nod at the astonished Louise, began to sponge out the cockpit.

"I see you've collected one of Old Noah's souvenirs," she remarked a moment later, noticing the blue bottle which Penny had tossed into the bottom of the boat.

"We found it floating in the water," Louise volunteered. "The message was such a queer one—an invitation to take refuge in the ark during the Great Deluge. Someone's idea of a joke, I suppose."

"It's no joke," Sara corrected. "Noah is a very real person. He actually lives in an ark too—a weird looking boat he built himself."

"You mean the old fellow actually believes there's going to be another great flood?" Penny asked incredulously.

"Oh, yes! Noah is so sure of it that he's collected a regular menagerie of animals to live with him on the ark. He keeps dropping bottles into the water warning folks that the Great Deluge is coming. I fish out dozens of them here at the dock."

"Where is the ark?" Penny inquired curiously.

Sara squeezed the last drop of water from the sponge and pointed diagonally upstream toward a gap in the trees.

"That's where Bug Run empties into the river," she explained. "Noah has his ark grounded not far

from its mouth. The currents are such that whenever he dumps his bottles in the water most of them come this way."

"Rather a nuisance I should think," commented Penny.

"Noah's a pest!" Sara complained, straightening from her task. "I suppose he's harmless, but those bottles of his create a hazard for our boats. Burt has asked him several times not to throw them in the water. He just keeps right on doing it."

The sun now was directly overhead and Penny and Louise knew that they were expected at their homes for luncheon. Thanking Sara for her services, they sailed on to their own dock. As they hastened through the park to a bus line, Penny remarked that it would be fun sometime to visit Noah and his ark.

"Well, perhaps," Louise rejoined without a great deal of enthusiasm.

The busses were off schedule and for a long while the girls waited impatiently at the street corner. Penny was gazing absently toward a cafe nearby when a short, untidy man with shaggy gray hair, came out of the building.

"Why, isn't that Mr. Oaks, the bridge watchman?" she asked her chum.

"It looks like him."

From far up the street an approaching bus could be seen, but Penny had lost all interest in boarding it.

"Louise, let's talk to Mr. Oaks," she urged, starting toward him.

"But we'll miss our bus."

"Who cares about that?" Penny took Louise firmly by an elbow, pulling her along. "We may not have another chance to see Mr. Oaks. I want to ask him why he identified the saboteur as Sara Ottman's brother."

CHAPTER

6

OLD NOAH

CARL OAKS saw the girls approaching, and recognized them with a curt nod of his head. He responded to their cheerful greeting, but with no warmth.

"I was hoping to see you, Mr. Oaks," Penny began the conversation. "Last night Louise and I had no opportunity to express our appreciation for the way you helped us."

"Well, I didn't help myself any," the old watchman broke in. "It was sure bad luck for me when your sailboat came floatin' down the river. Now I've lost my job."

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear it."

"I don't know what I'm going to do," Mr. Oaks resumed in a whining tone. "I've never been strong and I can't do hard work."

"Perhaps you can find another job as a watchman."

"No one will take me on after what happened last night."

"But it wasn't your fault the bridge was dynamited."

"Folks always are ready to push a man down if they get the chance," Mr. Oaks said bitterly. "No, I'm finished in this seedy town! I'd pull out if I had the price of a ticket."

Penny was decidedly troubled. "You mustn't take that attitude, Mr. Oaks," she replied. "Maybe I can help you."

The watchman looked interested, but amused. "How can you help me?" he demanded.

"My father owns the *Riverview Star*. Perhaps he can use an extra watchman at the newspaper building. If not, he may know someone who will employ you."

"I've always worked around the waterfront," Mr. Oaks returned, brightening a bit. "You know I ain't able to do much walkin' or any heavy lifting. Maybe your father can get me another job on a bridge."

"Well, I don't know," Penny responded. "I'll talk to him. Just give me your address so I can notify you later."

Mr. Oaks scribbled a few lines on the back of an old envelope and handed it to her. He did not express appreciation for the offer Penny had made, accepting it as his just due.

"I suppose the police questioned you about the bridge dynamiting," she remarked, pocketing the address.

"Sure, they gave me the works," he acknowledged, shrugging. "Kept me at the station half the night. Then this morning they had me identify one of the suspects."

"*Not* Burt Ottman?"

"Yeah."

"You didn't identify him as the saboteur?" Penny inquired in dismay.

"I told the police he looked like the fellow. And he did."

"But how could you see his face?" Penny protested. "The motorboat traveled so fast! Even when the man crawled out of the water and ran, one could only tell that he was tall and thin."

"He looked like young Ottman to me," the watchman insisted stubbornly. "Well, guess I'll shove on. You talk to your father and let me know about that job. I can use 'er."

Without giving the girls a chance to ask another question, Mr. Oaks moved off down the street.

"Now if things aren't in a nice mess," Penny remarked as she and Louise retraced their way to the bus stop. "No wonder the police held Burt Ottman! I don't see how Mr. Oaks could have thought he resembled the saboteur."

"I'm sure I didn't get a good look at the fellow," Louise returned. "Mr. Oaks must have wonderful eyes, to say the least."

After a ten minute wait, a bus came along, and the girls rode to their separate homes. Penny ate luncheon, helped Mrs. Weems with the dishes and then slipped away to her father's newspaper office.

An early afternoon edition of the *Star* had just rolled from the press. Entering the editorial room, Penny noted that it appeared to have been swept by a whirlwind. Discarded copy lay on the floor, and there were more wads of paper around the scrap baskets than in them.

Jerry Livingston's battered typewriter served as a comfortable foot rest for his unpolished shoes. Seeing Penny, he removed them to the floor, and grinned at her.

"Hello, Miss Pop-Eye!" he said affectionately. "How's our little sailor?"

"Never mind," returned Penny. "What's this I hear about Burt Ottman being arrested by the police?"

"That's how it is." The grin faded from the reporter's face. "Tough on DeWitt too."

"DeWitt?" Penny inquired. She could not guess what connection the editor might have with the dynamiting case.

Jerry glanced about the news room to make certain that DeWitt was not within hearing. In a low tone he confided:

"Didn't you know?" Burt Ottman is DeWitt's

first cousin. It rather puts him in a spot, being kin to a saboteur."

"Nothing has been proved against Ottman yet."

"All the same, it looks bad for the kid. When the story came in it gave DeWitt a nasty jolt."

"I should think so," nodded Penny. "Why, I never dreamed that he was related to the Ottman's."

"Neither did anyone else in the office. But you have to hand it to DeWitt. He took it squarely between the eyes. Didn't even play the story down nor ask your father to soft pedal it."

"Mr. DeWitt is a real newspaper man."

"Bet your life!" Jerry agreed with emphasis. "He's gone young Ottman's bail to the tune of ten thousand dollars."

"Why, that must represent a good portion of his life time savings."

"Sure, but DeWitt says the kid has been framed, and he's going to stand by him."

"I think myself that Burt Ottman was too far away to be properly identified. I mean to tell the police so, too."

"Well, we all hope for DeWitt's sake that it is a mistake," Jerry said soberly. "But the evidence is stacking up fast. The motorboat came from Ottman's. Carl Oaks said he recognized the saboteur as young Ottman. Then this morning police found a handkerchief with an initial "O" lying along the shore

not far from where the fellow crawled out of the water."

"Circumstantial evidence."

"Maybe so," Jerry agreed with a shrug, "but unless young Ottman gets a good lawyer, he's likely to find himself doing a long stretch."

Deeply troubled by the information, Penny went on toward her father's private office. As she passed the main copy desk where Editor DeWitt worked, she noticed that his face was white and tense. Although he usually had a smile for her, he barely glanced up and did not speak.

Penny tapped twice and entered her father's office. Mr. Parker had just finished dictating a letter to his secretary who quietly gathered up her notebook and departed. The newspaper owner pretended to glance at the calendar on his desk.

"Unless I'm all muddled, this is Saturday, not Thursday," he greeted his daughter teasingly. "Aren't you a bit mixed up?"

"Maybe so," Penny admitted, seating herself on a corner of the desk.

"You seldom honor me with a call except to collect your Thursday allowance."

"Oh, I'm not concerned with money these days," Penny said, trying to balance a paper weight on her father's head. "It's this dynamiting case that has me all tied in a knot."

"Stop it, Penny!" Irritably, Mr. Parker squirmed in his chair. "This is an office, not a child's play room!"

"Try to give me your undivided attention, Dad. I want you to do me a favor."

"How about granting me one first? Please stop playing with the gadgets on my desk!"

"Why, of course," grinned Penny, backing away. "Now about this job for Carl Oaks—"

"Job?"

"Yes, he was relieved of duty at the Thompson bridge, you know. It was partly my fault. So I want you to square matters by finding other work for him."

"Penny, I am *not* an employment agency! Anyway, what do I know about the man?"

"I owe him a job, Dad. He says he likes to work around the waterfront. Can't you get him something to do? Oh, yes, it has to be an easy job because he can't walk and he can't lift anything."

"How about a nice pension?" Mr. Parker demanded. He sighed and added, "Well, I'll see what I can do for him. Now run along, because I have work to get out."

Feeling certain that her father would find a suitable position for the old watchman, Penny went directly from the newspaper office to Louise Sidell's home. After relating all the latest news, she asked her chum

if she would not enjoy another excursion to the river.

"But we were just there a few hours ago!" Louise protested. "I've had enough sailing for one day."

"Oh, I don't care to sail either," Penny corrected hastily. "I thought it might be interesting to call on Old Noah."

"That queer old man who has the ark?"

"What do you say?"

"Oh, all right," Louise agreed, rather intrigued by the prospect. "But if we get into trouble, just remember it was your idea."

By bus the girls rode to a point near the river. Without approaching Ottman's Dock, they crossed the Big Bear over Thompson's bridge which had just been opened to pedestrian traffic only. Making their way along the eastern shore, they came at last to the mouth of Bug Run.

"It looks like rain to me," Louise declared, scanning the fast-moving clouds. "Just our luck to be caught in a downpour."

"Maybe we can take refuge in the ark," Penny laughed, leading the way up the meandering stream. "That is, if we can find it."

Trees and bushes grew thick and green along either bank of the run. Several times the girls were forced to muddy their shoes in order to proceed. In one shady glade, a bullfrog blinked at them before making a hasty dive into the lilypads.

There was no sign of a boat or any structure remotely resembling an ark. And then, rounding a bend, they suddenly saw it silhouetted against a darkening sky.

"Why, it looks just as if it had rolled out of The Old Testament!" Louise cried in astonishment.

The ark, painted red and blue, rose three stories from the muddy water. A large, circular window had been built in the uppermost part, and there were tiny, square openings beneath. From within could be heard a strange medley of animal sounds—the cackling of hens, the squeal of a pig, the squawking of a saucy parrot who kept calling: "Noah! Oh, Noah!"

Louise gripped Penny's hand. "Let's not go any nearer," she said uneasily. "It's starting to rain, and we ought to make a double dash for home."

A few drops of rain splashed into the stream. Dropping on the tin roof of the ark like tiny pellets of metal, they made a loud drumming sound. The disturbed hens began to cluck on their roosts. The parrot screeched loudly, "Oh, Noah! Come Noah!"

"Where is Noah?" Penny asked with a nervous giggle. "I certainly must see him before we leave."

As if in answer to her question, they heard a strange series of sounds from deep within the woods. A cow mooed, and a man spoke soothing words. Soon there emerged from among the trees a bewildering assort-

ment of animals and fowl—a cow, a goat, a pig, and two fat turkeys. An old man with a long white beard which fell to his chest, drove the creatures toward the gangplank of the ark.

"Get along, Bessie," he urged the cow, tapping her with his crooked stick. "The Lord maketh the rain to fall for forty days and forty nights, but you shall be saved. Into the ark!"

Penny fairly hugged herself with delight.

"Oh, Louise, we can't go now," she whispered. "That must be Old Noah. And isn't he a darling?"

CHAPTER

7

ARK OF THE MUD FLATS

UNAWARE THAT he was being observed, Old Noah again rapped the cow smartly on her flanks.

"Get along, Bessie," he urged impatiently. "The Heavens will open any minute now, and all the creatures of the earth shall perish. But this calamity shall not befall you, Bessie. You are one of God's chosen."

None too willing to be saved from impending doom, Bessie bellowed a loud protest as she was driven into the over-crowded ark. Next went the goat and the squealing pig. The turkeys made more trouble, gobbling excitedly as the old man shooed them into the confines of the three-storied boat.

His task accomplished, Old Noah wiped his perspiring brow with a big red handkerchief. He stood for a moment, gazing anxiously up at the boiling storm clouds.

"This is it—the second great flood," he murmured. "For the Lord sayeth, 'I will cause it to rain forty

days and forty nights and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth.' "

As he stood thus, gazing at the sky, Noah made a striking figure. In his prime, the old man evidently had been a stalwart physical specimen, and advancing years had not enfeebled him. His face was that of a Prophet of old. A certain child-like simplicity shone from a pair of trusting blue eyes whose direct gaze bespoke implicit belief.

"Let's speak to him," Penny urged. Although Louise tried to hold back, she pulled her along toward the ark.

Old Noah heard the girls coming and turned quickly around. After the first moment of startled surprise, he leaned on his crooked stick and inquired with a kind smile:

"Why have you come, my daughters?"

"Well, we were curious to see this fine ark," Penny replied. "We picked up one of your floating blue bottles with a message in it."

"Blessed are they that heed the warnings of the Lord," murmured Old Noah. "I, his servant, have prepared a place of refuge for all who come."

By this time rain was falling steadily, and Louise huddled against a tree trunk for protection. "Penny, for Pete's Sake—" she protested.

"Follow me, my daughters," bade Old Noah, mo-

tioning for them to cross the gangplank into the ark. "Inside you will find food and shelter."

"We could use a little shelter," said Penny, glancing questioningly at her chum. "How about it, Lou? Shall we go inside and meet the animals?"

Louise hesitated, for in truth she was a bit afraid of the queer old man.

"Come, my daughters," Noah bade again. "Have no fear. The Lord sayeth, 'Noah, with thee will I establish my covenant, and thou shalt enter into the ark.' "

"We'll drown if we stay outside," laughed Penny, following boldly after the old man. "Come on, Louise."

Unmindful of the falling rain, Noah stooped to pick up a bedraggled kitten from underfoot.

"It's a very nice boat," Penny remarked, dodging under the shelter of the roof. Louise huddled close beside her.

"A sturdy ark," agreed Old Noah proudly. "Many, many months did I labor building it. The Lord said, 'make thee an ark of gopher wood.' But of gopher wood there was none to be had. Then the Lord came to me in a dream and said, 'Noah, use anything you can find.' So I gathered timbers from the beaches, and I wrecked an abandoned cottage I found in the woods. I felled trees. And I pitched the seams within and without as the Lord bade me."

"What animals do you keep inside?" Penny inquired curiously.

"Well, mostly creatures that aren't too exacting in their needs," said Noah, perching the wet kitten on his shoulder. "The Lord sayeth two of every kind, male and female. But it wasn't practical. Some of the animals were too big to keep aboard the ark."

A disturbance from within the boat interrupted the old man's explanation. "Excuse me, daughters, I've got to fasten Bessie in her stall," he apologized. "If I keep her waitin' she's apt to kick the ark to pieces!"

Old Noah disappeared into the lower story of the boat. Peering in the open door, the girls saw row upon row of stalls and cages. There was a sty for the pigs, a pen for the goat, a little kennel for the dog, low roosts for the fowls. The walls of the room had been whitewashed and the floor was clean.

"What a life Old Noah must lead!" Louise whispered to Penny. "Why, it must be worse than being a zoo keeper!"

In a moment the old fellow reappeared. Beckoning to the girls, he led them up a little flight of stairs to the second floor of the ark.

"This is my bird room," he said, opening a door.

"Hello, Noah!" croaked a brilliantly colored parrot, fluttering on her perch. "You old rascal! Polly wants a slug o' rum!"

Noah glanced quickly at the girls. "I am humble

and ashamed," he apologized. "But the bird means no evil. I bought her of a sailor, who, I fear had wandered from the ways of righteousness."

Placing a drink of water near the parrot, the old man directed attention to a cage containing a pair of doves.

"When the flood waters recede, I shall send these birds forth from a window of the ark," he explained. "If they return with a branch of a bush or any green thing, then I shall know that the Lord no longer is angry."

"How long do you imagine it will rain?" Louise asked absently, staring out the little round window.

"Forty days and forty nights," answered Old Noah. Taking a bag of seed, he began to feed the chirping birds. "While your stay here may be somewhat confining, you will find my ark sturdy and snug."

"Our stay here," Louise echoed hollowly.

Penny gave her a little pinch and said to Old Noah, "We appreciate your hospitality and will be happy to remain until the rain slackens. But where are your living quarters?"

"On the third floor. First, before I conduct you there, I will throw out a few bottles. Although the fatal hour is near at hand, a number of persons may yet read my message and seek refuge in time to be saved."

While the girls watched with deep interest, Old Noah moved to the porthole. Opening it, he tossed into the muddy waters a half dozen corked bottles which he selected from a basket beneath the window.

"Now," he bade, turning again to Penny and Louise, "follow me and I will show you my humble quarters."

By this time the girls scarcely knew what to expect, but the third floor of the ark proved rather a pleasant surprise. Old Noah had fitted it out with compartments, a tiny kitchen, living quarters, and a bedroom. The main room had a rug on the floor, there were several homemade chairs and a radio. Evidently, the master of the ark was musically inclined, for a shelf contained an accordion, a banjo and a mouth organ.

"Just sit down and make yourselves comfortable, daughters," Old Noah invited, waving them toward chairs. "I'll stir up a bite to eat."

Entering the tiny kitchen, he poked about among the shelves. Watching rather anxiously, the girls next saw him open one of the portholes to test his fishing lines. Finding one taut, he pulled in a large catfish which he immediately began to dress.

"He intends to cook that for us," Louise whispered. "I'll not even taste it! Oh, let's get away from here!"

Penny wandered to the window. The sky had grown much lighter, and trees which had been blotted out by the heavy rain, now were visible.

"The storm is almost over," she said encouragingly. "Let's step outside and see how things look."

Noah, occupied with his culinary affairs, did not glance up as the girls quietly slipped away. Descending the steps to the main deck, they huddled close against a wall to keep dry. Rain still fell, but even as they watched it slackened.

"Let's say goodbye to Noah and streak for home," Louise suggested, eager to be off.

Before Penny could reply, both girls were startled to see a stranger emerge from among the bushes along the shore. He wore a raincoat, a broad-brimmed hat which dripped water, and a bright badge gleamed on his chest.

"I'm Sheriff Anderson," he announced, coming close to the ark. "Is Dan Grebe aboard?"

"Do you mean Old Noah?" Penny asked doubtfully.

"Most folks call him that. An old man who's lost his buttons, but harmless. He's been maintaining a public nuisance here with his ark."

As the sheriff started to come aboard, Old Noah himself stepped out on deck.

"So here you be again!" he shouted angrily, grasping the narrow railing of the gangplank. "Didn't I warn you not to trespass on the property of the Lord?"

"Noah, we've been patient with you," the sheriff

replied wearily. "The last time I was here, you promised to clean up this dump and move your ark down stream. Now you're going with me to talk to the judge."

"Stand back! Stand back!" Old Noah shouted as the officer started across the gangplank. "Beware, or I'll call the wrath of the Lord down on your head!"

The sheriff laughed and came on. With surprising strength and agility, Old Noah jerked the gangplank loose from the ark and hurled it into the water. Sheriff Anderson made a desperate lunge for an overhanging tree branch. Failing to seize it, he fell with a loud splash into the muddy river.

CHAPTER

8

THE GREEN PARROT

OLD NOAH slapped his thigh and cackled with glee as he watched Sheriff Anderson splash about in the muddy water.

"That'll teach you!" he shouted jubilantly. "You meddlin' son of evil! Next time maybe you will know enough to mind your own business and leave my ark alone!"

Penny and Louise stood ready to toss the sheriff a rope, but he did not need it. Clinging to the floating gangplank, the man awkwardly propelled himself to shore. As he tried to climb up the steep bank, his boots slipped and he fell flat on his face in the mud. Old Noah went off into another fit of laughter which fairly shook the art at its mooring.

"Laugh, you old coot!" the sheriff muttered, picking himself up. "I've been mighty patient with you, but there's a limit. Tomorrow I'm coming back here with a detail of deputies. I'll run you and your ark out o' here if it's the last thing I do!"

"Be off with you!" ordered Noah arrogantly. "Before *my* patience is gone!"

"Okay, Noah, you win this round," the sheriff muttered furiously. "I'm going, but I'll be back. And if this ark isn't cleaned up or out o' here, we'll put you away!"

A sorry figure with his clothing wet and muddy, the official stomped angrily off into the woods.

"I'm afraid you antagonized the wrong man that time, Noah," Penny remarked as the footsteps died away. "What will you do when he returns?"

"That time will never come," Old Noah replied, undisturbed. "Before the Lord will allow the ark to be taken from me, he will smite my enemies with lightning from the Heavens."

Penny and Louise had their own opinion of what would happen to the ark and its animals, but wisely said nothing to further disturb the old fellow. By this time the rain had entirely ceased and a ray of sunshine straggled through the ragged clouds.

"Well, guess this isn't to be the Great Flood after all," Penny remarked, studying the sky. "We're most grateful for the shelter of your ark, Noah. Now if we can just reach shore, we'll be on our way."

"Aren't you staying for dinner?" the old man asked in disappointment. "I'm fryin' up a nice catfish."

"I'm afraid we can't remain today," Penny answered. "Another time perhaps."

Using a long, hooked pole, Old Noah retrieved the drifting gangplank and refastened it to the ark.

"Farewell, my daughters," he said regretfully as he bade them goodbye. "You and your friends always will be welcome to take refuge in my ark. The Great Flood is coming soon, but you are among the chosen."

Feeling decidedly exhilarated by their meeting with such a strange character, Louise and Penny followed the twisting stream to the main river channel. Water was rising rapidly along the banks and at many places, bushes and tree branches dipped low in the swirling eddies.

"You know, if these spring rains keep up, Noah may get his big flood after all," Penny remarked. "Poor old fellow! He certainly sealed the fate of his ark when he pushed Sheriff Anderson into Bug Run."

Turning homeward toward the Thompson Bridge, the girls soon approached the river bank where police had searched for the escaped saboteur. Curious to see the locality by daylight, they detoured slightly in order to pass it.

"This is the place," Penny said, indicating ground which had been trampled by many feet. "At the rate the river rises, the shore here will be under by tomorrow."

"I suppose police learned everything they could last night."

"Yes, they went over the area rather thoroughly," Penny nodded. "I know they took photographs and made measurements of the saboteur's footprints. Lucky they did, because the water has washed them all away."

"You still can see where the automobile was parked," Louise declared, pointing to tire tracks in the soft earth. "Were any real clues found, Penny?"

"Jerry told me police picked up a handkerchief bearing the initial 'O.' "

"That could stand for Ottman!"

"Likewise Oscar or Oliver or Oxenstiern," Penny added, frowning. "I'll admit though, it doesn't look too bright for Sara's brother."

Having satisfied their curiosity regarding the locality, the girls started on toward the bridge. Before they had gone a dozen feet, Penny's eye was caught by an object lying half-buried in the mud. She picked it up gingerly and dangling it in front of Louise was amazed to discover that it was a man's leather billfold.

"Anything inside?" inquired Louise with interest.

Penny opened the flap and explored the various divisions of the money container. To her disappointment it held nothing save one small card upon which had been scribbled a few words.

" 'The Green Parrot—' " she read aloud. " 'Tuesday at 9:15.' Now what does that mean?"

Beneath the notation appeared another: "The American Protective Society."

"I guess it doesn't mean much of anything," commented Louise, digging at the mud which had collected on her shoes. "Probably an appointment card."

"You don't suppose this billfold was dropped by the saboteur?" Penny asked thoughtfully. "It's very near the place where he crawled out of the river."

"Wouldn't the police have picked it up if they had considered it of any importance?"

"I doubt they ever saw it, Lou. The billfold was half buried in mud. I'd never have seen it myself if I hadn't almost stepped on it."

"Why not turn it over to the police?"

"Guess I will," Penny decided, replacing the card in the billfold and wrapping them both in her handkerchief. "Did you ever hear of the American Protective Society, Lou?"

"Never did. Nor 'The Green Parrot' either—whatever that is."

"I think The Green Parrot is a café or a night club with none too good a reputation," Penny said thoughtfully. "I'm sure I've heard Dad say it's a gambling place."

Without further adventure, the girls resumed their trek and soon reached a bus line. Upon arriving home, Penny's first act was to consult the telephone

directory. She could find neither The Green Parrot nor the American Protective Society listed.

"Mrs. Weems, did you ever hear of a place called The Green Parrot?" she questioned the housekeeper.

"Isn't that a restaurant the police closed down a few months ago?" replied Mrs. Weems. "Now why should you be bothering your head about The Green Parrot?"

Penny showed her the billfold and explained where she had found it.

"Dear me," sighed the housekeeper. "How you can get into so many affairs of this kind is a wonder to me. I'm sure it worries your father too."

"Not Dad," laughed Penny. "Since I dug up that big story for him about the old *Wishing Well*, he's been reconciled to my career of news gathering."

"Wishing wells and saboteurs are two entirely different matters," the housekeeper returned firmly. "I do hope you turn this billfold over to police and forget about suspicious characters."

"I'm only worried about one," rejoined Penny. "It bothers me because I involved Burt Ottman in such a mess. I'm not so sure he's guilty."

"And again, the police probably know exactly what they are about," replied Mrs. Weems. "Now please take that billfold to the authorities and let them do the worrying."

Thus urged, Penny carried the money container to

the local police station. Unable to talk to any of the detectives connected with the dynamiting case, she left the billfold with a desk sergeant. As she turned to leave, after answering his many questions, she posed one of her own.

"Oh, by the way, did you ever hear of a place called The Green Parrot?"

"Sure," the sergeant responded. "It's a night club. Used to be located on Granger Street, but our boys made it too hot for 'em, so they moved to another place."

"Where is it now?"

"Couldn't tell you," answered the sergeant. "You'll have to talk to one of the detectives, Jim Adams or Bill Benson."

Having no real excuse for seeking the information, Penny decided to abandon the quest. For want of an occupation, she sauntered on toward the *Star* office. Pausing in front of the big plate glass window, she idly watched a workman who was oiling one of the great rotary presses.

"Oh, here you are!" exclaimed a voice from behind her.

Whirling around, Penny saw that her father had just come through the revolving doors at the main entrance to the building.

"Hello, Dad," she greeted him eagerly. "What's new in the dynamiting case?"

"Nothing so far as I know," he replied, rather indifferently. "Burt Ottman's been released on bail."

"Mr. DeWitt put up the money?"

"Yes, he did," Mr. Parker said, frowning. "I advised him against it, but DeWitt feels a duty to the boy. Were you looking for me, Penny?"

"Well, not in particular."

"I'm on my way to a bank meeting," Mr. Parker said, turning away. "Oh, yes, I arranged a job for that watchman complication of yours, Carl Oaks."

"You did? Oh, grand! What sort of work is it?"

"Can't take time to tell you now," Mr. Parker said hurriedly, hailing a passing taxi cab. "If you want all the details, ask Jerry Livingston. He took care of the matter for me, and can give you the information."

CHAPTER

9

A JOB FOR MR. OAKS

EAGER TO learn what had been done to help Carl Oaks, Penny took an elevator to the news room of the *Star*. Jerry Livingston's desk was deserted, so she paused at the slot of the big circular copy desk to ask Editor DeWitt if the reporter were anywhere in the building.

"I just sent him to cover a fire," Mr. DeWitt replied, glancing up from copy he was correcting. "He ought to be back any minute. You know how Jerry covers a fire."

"I certainly do. He rides the big engine to the scene, just whiffs at the smoke, and races back with a column report!"

Penny hesitated. She very much wished to say something to the editor about the dynamiting case, yet was reluctant to bring up the subject.

"Mr. DeWitt, I'm sorry about Burt Ottman," she began awkwardly. "I hope you don't think that I tried to throw suspicion on him by telling police——"

"Of course not," he cut in. "It's just a case of circumstantial evidence. Burt has a good lawyer now. I'm not a bit worried."

The harassed expression of DeWitt's face belied his words. He had always been known to fellow workers as a hard yet just man, but now it seemed to Penny that the veteran newspaperman was losing his grip. Though he fancied he disguised his feelings, it was plain to all that Burt Ottman's arrest had shaken him.

"Guess I won't wait for Jerry," Penny said, turning away.

Leaving the newspaper office, she dropped in at Foster's Drugstore to perch herself on a counter stool.

"I'll take a deluxe dose of Hawaiian Delight with whipped cream," she told the soda fountain clerk.

"No pineapple," he said sadly. "And no whipped cream."

"Then make it a double chocolate malted."

"We're out of chocolate. Sorry."

"Just bring me an empty dish and let me look at it for awhile," Penny grinned.

"How about a nice vanilla sundae with crushed walnuts?" the clerk coaxed.

"Oh, all right," Penny gave in. "And don't spare the walnuts!"

She ate the ice cream leisurely and had finished the last spoonful when a young man breezed into the

drugstore. Recognizing Jerry Livingston, Penny signaled frantically. Without seeing her, he dodged into a telephone booth. He slammed out again in a moment and sat down at the counter.

"Cup o' Java and make it strong," he ordered carelessly.

"Sorry, sir, no coffee served without meals," teased Penny from another stool. "How about a nice vanilla sundae with crushed walnuts?"

Jerry grinned as he saw her and moved over to an adjoining stool.

"Where was the fire?" she inquired curiously.

"At the Fulton Warehouse along the dock. It was deliberately set."

"By saboteurs?"

"Looks that way. Workmen discovered the blaze in time to prevent the whole plant going up in smoke. Just got through telephoning the story to DeWitt."

"Isn't the *Star* building across the street?"

"Sure, but that's a long walk. Besides, I'm due at the airport for my flying lesson."

"Your which?" inquired Penny alertly.

"I'm training to be an angel," Jerry laughed. "I figure it like this. I can't get along without my six cups o' Java a day, so the only place for me is in Uncle Sam's Air Corps."

"How soon will you be leaving, Jerry?"

"Not until I've completed my local training. Oh, I'll probably be grinding out news stories for quite some time yet."

Penny drew a quick breath and changed the subject. One by one familiar faces were disappearing from the *Star* office, but somehow it gave her a special twinge to think that Jerry soon must go. In the pursuit of news they had shared many an adventure.

"Jerry," she said abruptly, "Dad told me you were able to get Carl Oaks a job."

"One of sorts. It doesn't pay much, but it's soft. Oaks is hired by the Riverview Coal Company to guard their barge that's tied up at Dock 10."

"Thanks a lot, Jerry, for going to so much trouble. Mr. Oaks ought to be quite grateful."

"Not that fellow! He held out for more pay."

"Are the duties hard?"

"Hard? All he has to do is stay aboard the barge and see that no one tries to make off with it."

"I can't imagine anyone trying to steal a coal barge," laughed Penny.

"Oh, it's done now and then," Jerry rejoined carelessly. "These days they'll even steal the hawsers off a boat."

"What value would the rope have to a thief?"

"Hawsers are expensive," the reporter explained. "Right now it's almost impossible to get good grade

hemp. A hawser of any size commands a big price second hand."

"How do the thieves get the ropes, Jerry?"

"Oh, they wait for a dark or foggy night and then slip up to an unguarded boat and cut her loose."

"Why, that's a form of sabotage!" Penny cried indignantly.

"Sure, it is. The boats float free and unless they're spotted, they're likely to collide with other incoming vessels. Only last week an empty coal barge was cut loose. She crashed into an oil tanker and rammed a hole in her."

"Then Carl Oaks really has an important job," Penny said thoughtfully.

"Important in the sense that he's got to keep his eyes open. But he's not required to do any hard work. All he has to do is sit."

"Then he should like the job," Penny smiled, sliding down from the stool. "When does he start work?"

"He took over this morning."

"Maybe I'll ankle down to Dock 10 and talk to him."

"Better wrap yourself in cellophane first," Jerry advised. "That is, if you value your peaches and cream complexion."

Penny was not certain what the reporter meant, but a little later, approaching the coal docks, she under-

stood. Nearby was a private railroad yard and cars were being loaded from the many mountains of coal heaped on the ground. With the wind blowing toward the river, the dust laden air blackened her hands and clothing.

Penny stood for a moment watching a coal car race down from a steep switch-back, and then wandered along the docks in search of Mr. Oaks.

She came presently to the barge for which she searched. There was no sign of anyone aboard. A long ladder ascended from the dock to the vessel's deck. Penny hesitated and then decided to climb it. When she was midway up, a man, his face blackened with coal, stepped from a shed.

"Hey, where you think you're going?" he shouted sternly.

"I'm looking for Mr. Oaks," Penny explained, hugging the ladder.

"Oaks? The new watchman?"

"Yes. He's aboard, isn't he?"

"He should be. Well, go on up, I guess, but it's against regulations."

Penny climbed the remaining rungs of the ladder and stepped out on the deck of the barge. She was chagrined to see that she had wiped up a great deal of coal dust.

"Oh, Mr. Oaks!" she called. "Are you here?"

From the tiny deck house the old man emerged.

No smile brightened his smudged face as he recognized Penny.

"This is a swell job your father got me!" he greeted her.

"Why, Mr. Oaks, you don't act as if you like it," Penny replied, walking toward him. "What seems to be wrong?"

"The pay's poor," he said crossly. "I'm expected to stay on this rotten old tub twenty-four hours a day with only time off for my meals. It's so dirty around here that if a fellow'd take a deep breath he'd get a hunk o' coal stuck in his nose!"

"It *is* rather unpleasant," Penny admitted. "But then, the wind can't always blow in this direction."

"I want you to ask your father to find me another job," the watchman went on. "I'd like one on a bridge again."

"Well, I don't know. After what happened—"

"And whose fault was it?" Mr. Oaks interrupted angrily. "I helped you and that girl friend of yours, didn't I? Well, now it's your turn to do me a little favor, 'specially since it wasn't my fault I lost the bridge job."

"I'll talk to Dad," Penny said. Annoyed by the watchman's attitude, she did not prolong the interview, but quickly climbed down from the barge.

From the coal yards she followed the river for a distance, coming presently to more pleasant surround-

ings. She was still thinking about Carl Oaks as she approached the Ottman boathouse. Sara and a young man were deeply engrossed in examining a large metal object which appeared to be a homemade diving hood.

For a moment Penny assumed that Sara's companion was Bill Evans. However, as the young man turned slightly, she saw his face.

"Why, it's Burt Ottman!" she thought. "He's back on his old job after being released from jail. I'm going to talk to him and see what he'll say!"

CHAPTER

10

SALVAGE AND SABOTEURS

SARA OTTMAN and her brother glanced up from their work as Penny approached the dock. Burt was a tall young man of twenty-six, brown of face, with muscles hardened by heavy, outdoor work. He nodded to Penny, but his expression did not disclose whether or not he bore resentment.

"Anything we can do for you?" he asked, his manner impersonal.

"No, I just happened to be over this way and thought I'd stop for a minute. What's this strange contraption?" Penny indicated the queer looking metal hood.

"A diving apparatus Burt made," Sara explained briefly. "We're using it to get Bill Evans' motor out of the river."

"How does it work?"

"Watch and see," invited Sara. "Burt's going to make the first dive."

Though Penny felt that she was none too welcome at the dock, she nevertheless decided to remain. Burt disappeared into the shed, reappearing a minute later in bathing trunks. He and Sara loaded the diving hood into a boat and rowed to the nearby area which had been marked with a can buoy.

Burt adjusted the metal helmet over his head and lowered himself into the water. Once her brother was beneath the surface, Sara worked tirelessly at the pump, feeding him air. Soon Bill Evans drifted by in another boat, watching the salvage operation like a worried mother.

"Think you'll get 'er?" he asked Sara. "Doggone if I know how an engine could be so hard to find."

Sara did not bother to answer, but kept pumping steadily.

After many minutes, the metal hood appeared on the surface. Burt Ottman lifted it from his head and took a deep breath.

"Any luck?" Bill asked anxiously.

"I'll have the engine up in a little bit," Burt replied. Breasting himself into the boat, he pulled on a rope tied around his waist. With Sara helping, he gradually hauled the lost motor from its muddy bed.

"Oh, say, that's swell!" Bill cried jubilantly. "How can I thank you?"

"Don't forget the five dollars," Sara reminded him. "Burt and I can use it."

"Oh, sure," Bill replied, though the light faded from his eyes. "I haven't got it on me right now. Can you wait a few days?"

"Waiting is the best thing we do," Sara assured him. "Better get this mess of junk cleaned and oiled up right away or it won't be worth a dime."

"I will," promised Bill. "Just dump 'er on the dock for me, will you?"

Sara and her brother delivered the motor to the designated place, and then rowed to their own platform where Penny waited. From the look of their faces it was evident that they never expected to be paid for their work.

Alighting from the boat, Sara noticed one of Old Noah's floating bottles which had snagged against the edge of the platform. Rather irritably she fished it from the water. Without bothering to read the message inside, she hurled it high on the shore.

"Sara, you're in an ugly mood today," her brother observed, smiling.

"I get tired of seeing those bottles!" she replied. "I get tired of doing so much charity work too! How are we to meet our expenses, pay for a lawyer, and—"

"Never mind," Burt interrupted quietly.

Sara subsided into silence. They moored the boat and Burt, carrying the diving bell with him, went into the shed.

"Guess you think I'm a regular old crab," Sara remarked, turning toward Penny.

"Oh, I don't know," Penny answered. "I'm sure you have plenty to worry you."

"I do! Since the papers published the bridge dynamiting story, our business has shrunk to almost nothing. Burt's case is coming up for trial in about ten days. I don't know how we'll pay the lawyer. If Mr. DeWitt hadn't put up bail, my brother still would be in jail."

"Oh, you shouldn't feel so discouraged," Penny said cheerfully. "Burt will be cleared."

"I wish I could think so. He's innocent, but to prove it is another matter."

"Can't your brother provide an alibi? Where was he at the time of the dynamiting?"

"I don't know," Sara admitted, frowning. "Burt's peculiar. I tried to talk things over with him, but he says it's a disagreeable subject. He hasn't told me where he was Friday night."

Burt's appearance in the doorway of the shed brought the conversation to an abrupt end. Before Penny could speak to him, a group of small boys ran along the bank some distance away.

"*Saboteur! Saboteur!*" they shouted jeeringly, pointing at Burt. One of the lads threw a clod of dirt which struck a moored rowboat.

"You see how it is!" Sara cried wrathfully.

"Don't take things so seriously," Burt advised, though his own eyes burned with an angry light. "They're only youngsters."

"I can't stand much more," Sara cried, running into the shed, and closing the door.

Burt busied himself cleaning the clod of dirt from the rowboat. "Don't mind Sara," he said. "She's always inclined to be high strung."

"I'm sorry about everything," said Penny quietly. "Mr. DeWitt believes you will be cleared."

Burt straightened, staring at the far shore. "Wish I felt the same way. Unless the real saboteur is caught, the police intend to tag me with the job."

"They can't convict you without evidence. Oh, by the way, did you ever lose a leather billfold?"

The question surprised Burt. He hesitated before he answered: "What made you ask me that?"

"I found an old one along the river. No money or any identification in it. Just a card which said: 'The Green Parrot. Tuesday at 9:15.'"

"The Green Parrot!"

"You've heard of the place?"

"Oh, I've heard of it," Burt answered carelessly. "That's all. I never was there. Sorry I can't claim the billfold."

As if uneasy lest he be questioned further, the young man picked up a coil of rope and walked away.

Penny waited a moment and then left the dock.

"I'm just a nuisance around there," she thought unhappily. "I'd like to help, but Sara and Burt won't let me."

The following two days passed without event so far as Penny was concerned. There were no developments regarding the bridge dynamiting case and the story was relegated to an inside page of the *Star*. However, recalling her promise to Carl Oaks, she did speak to her father about finding him a new job.

"What does that fellow expect?" Mr. Parker rumbled irritably. "Jerry tells me he's a ne'er-do-well. Why doesn't he like his job as watchman on the coal barge?"

"Well, it's too dirty."

"Carl Oaks is lucky to get any job in this town," Mr. Parker answered. "Jerry had a hard time inducing anyone to take him on. Along the waterfront he has a reputation for shiftlessness."

"In that case, just forget it, Dad. I don't like the man too well myself."

Penny promptly forgot about Carl Oaks, but many times she caught herself wondering what had happened to Old Noah and his ark. Since she and Louise had visited the place, it had rained every day. The water was slowly rising in the river and there was talk that a serious flood might result.

On Tuesday night, as Penny and Louise paid their

weekly visit to the Rialto Theatre, it was still raining. The gutters were deep with water and to cross the street it was necessary to walk stiffly on their heels.

"We've had enough H_2O for one week," Penny declared, gazing at her splashed stockings. "Well, for screaming out loud!"

A green taxicab, turning in the street to pick up a fare, shot a fountain of muddy water from its spinning wheels. Penny, who stood close to the curb, was sprayed from head to foot.

"Just look at me!" she wailed. "That driver ought to be sent to prison for life!"

The taxi drew up in front of the Rialto Theatre. A well-dressed man in brown overcoat and felt hat who waited at the curb, opened the cab door.

"To the Green Parrot," he ordered the driver.

"Where's that, sir?"

The passenger mumbled an address the girls could not understand. He then slammed shut the cab door and the vehicle drove away.

"Lou, did you hear what I heard?" Penny cried excitedly.

"I certainly did!"

Penny glanced quickly about. Seeing another taxicab across the street, she hailed it.

"Come on, Louise," she urged, tugging at her chum's hand.

Louise held back. "What do you intend to do?"

"Why, we're going to follow that taxi!" Penny splashed through the flooded gutter toward the waiting cab. "This is a real break for us! With luck we'll learn the location of The Green Parrot!"

CHAPTER

11

PURSUIT BY TAXI

"KEEP THAT green taxi in sight!" Penny instructed her own cab driver as she and Louise leaped into the rear seat.

"Sure," agreed the taxi man, showing no surprise at the request.

Thrilled, and feeling rather theatrical, Penny and Louise sat on the edge of their seats. Anxiously they watched the green cab ahead. Weaving in and out of downtown traffic, it cruised at a slow speed and so, was not hard to follow.

Louise gazed at the running tape of the taxi meter. "Do you see that ticker?" she whispered. "I hope you're well fortified with spare change."

"I haven't much money with me. Let's trust that The Green Parrot is somewhere close."

"More than likely it's miles out in the country," Louise returned pessimistically.

The green cab presently turned down a narrow,

little-traveled street not many blocks from the river front. As it halted at the curb, Penny's driver glanced at her for instructions.

"Don't stop," she directed. "Drive on past and pull up around the corner."

The taxi man did as requested, presenting a bill for one dollar and eighty cents. To pay the sum, Penny used all of her own money and borrowed a quarter from her chum.

"That leaves me with just thirty-eight cents," Louise said ruefully. "No picture show tonight. And how are we to get home?"

"We're not far from a bus line. Come on, we're wasting valuable time."

"Those two words, 'Come on' have involved me in more trouble than all the rest of the English language," Louise giggled nervously. "What are we to do now we're here?"

Penny did not answer. Rounding the corner, she saw that the green cab and its passenger had disappeared. For an instant she was bitterly disappointed. Then she noticed a creaking sign which swung above a basement entrance. Although inconspicuous, it bore the picture of a green parrot.

"That's the place, Lou!" she exclaimed.

"Well, we've learned the address, so let's go home."

"Wonder what it's like inside?"

"Don't you dare start that old curiosity of yours to

percolating!" Louise chided severely. "We're *not* going in there!"

"Who ever thought of such a thing?" grinned Penny. "Now I wonder what time it is?"

"About eight-thirty or perhaps a little later. Why?"

"Do you remember that card we found in the leather billfold? The notation read, 'The Green Parrot, Tuesday at 9:15.'"

"So it did, but the appointment may have been for nine fifteen in the morning."

"You dope!" laughed Penny. "Louise, we're in wonderful luck finding this place at just this hour! Why, the man we followed here may be the one who lost the billfold."

"All of which makes him a saboteur, I suppose?"

"Not necessarily, but don't you think we ought to try to learn more?"

"I knew you'd try to get me into that place," Louise complained. "Well, I have more sense than to do it. It might not be safe."

"I shouldn't think of venturing in unescorted," Penny assured her. "Why not telephone my father and ask him to come here right away?"

"Well, that might not be such a bad idea," Louise acknowledged reluctantly. "But where can we find a phone?"

Passing The Green Parrot, the girls walked on a few doors until they came to a corner drugstore. Going inside, they closed themselves into a telephone booth. Borrowing a nickel from Louise, Penny called her home, but there was no response.

"Mrs. Weems went to a meeting tonight, and I suppose Dad must be away," she commented anxiously.

"Then let's give it up."

"I'll try the newspaper office," Penny decided. "If Dad isn't there, I'll talk to one of the reporters."

Mr. Parker was not to be contacted at the *Star* plant, nor was Editor DeWitt available. Penny asked to speak to Jerry Livingston and presently heard his voice at the other end of the wire. Without wasting words she told him where she was and what she wanted him to do.

"*The Green Parrot!*" Jerry exclaimed, copying down the address she gave him. "Say, that's worthwhile information. I'll be with you girls as soon as I can get there."

"We'll be outside the corner drugstore," Penny told him. "You'll know us by the way we pace back and forth!"

Within twelve minutes a cab pulled up and Jerry leaped out to greet the two girls.

"Where is this Parrot place?" he demanded, gazing curiously at the dingy buildings.

Louise and Penny led him down the street to the basement entrance. Music could be heard from within, but blinds covered all the windows.

"It must be a cafe," commented Jerry. He turned toward Penny and stared. "Say, what's the matter with your face?"

"My face?"

"You look as if you're coming down with the black measles!"

"Oh, a taxi splashed me with mud," Penny laughed, sponging at her cheeks with a handkerchief. "How do I look now?"

"Better. Let's go."

Taking the girls each by an elbow, Jerry guided them down the stone steps. Confronted with a curving door, he boldly thrust it open.

"Now act as if you belonged here," he warned the girls.

The trio found themselves in a carpeted, luxuriously furnished foyer. From a large dining room nearby came laughter and music.

As the outside door closed behind the young people, a bell tinkled to announce their arrival. Almost at once a head waiter appeared in the archway to the left. He was tall and dark, with a noticeable scar across one cheek. His shrewd eyes scrutinized them, but he bowed politely enough.

"A party of three, sir?"

"Right," agreed Jerry.

They followed the waiter into a dimly lighted dining room with more tables than customers. A four-piece orchestra provided rather dreary music for dancing. Jerry reluctantly allowed a checkroom girl to capture his hat.

The head waiter turned the party over to another waiter.

"Table thirteen," he instructed, and spoke rapidly in French.

"Table thirteen," complained Jerry. "Can't you give us something besides that?"

"Monsieur is superstitious?" The head waiter smiled in a superior way.

"Not superstitious, just cautious."

"As you wish, Monsieur. Table two."

Jerry and the girls were guided to the far end of the room, somewhat apart from the other diners. A large potted palm obstructed their view.

"I think they've hung the Indian sign on us," Jerry muttered after the waiter had gone. "See anyone you know, Penny?"

"That man over by the door—the one sitting alone," she indicated in a whisper. "Louise and I followed him here."

"The one that's wrestling with the lobster?"

"Yes, don't stare at him, Jerry. He's watching us."

The waiter arrived with glasses of water and menu

cards. Jerry and the girls scanned the list in secret consternation. Scarcely an item was priced at less than a dollar, and even a modest meal would cost a large sum.

"I'm not very hungry," Louise said helpfully. "I'll take a ham sandwich."

"So will I," added Penny.

"Three hams with plenty of mustard," ordered Jerry breezily.

The waiter gave him a long glance. "And your drink, sir?"

"Water," said Jerry. "Cool, refreshing water, preferably with a small piece of ice."

The waiter favored the trio with another unflattering look and went to the kitchen.

"This is a gyp place," Penny declared indignantly. "I can't understand why anyone would come here. The waiters all seem to be French."

"Oh, all head waiters speak French," Jerry replied. "You can't tell by that. I'd say they were German myself."

Penny studied the cafe employees with new interest. She noted that the head waiter kept an alert eye upon the entire room, but particularly he watched their table.

Soon the three orders of ham sandwiches were brought by the waiter. The young people ate as

slowly as they could so they would have an excuse for remaining as long as they desired.

"What time is it, Jerry?" Penny asked anxiously.

"Ten after nine," he answered, looking at his watch.

A bell jingled, and the young people knew that another customer had arrived. Craning their necks to see around the palm tree, they watched the dining room entranceway. In a moment a young man entered and was greeted by the head waiter. Jerry and the girls stared, scarcely believing their eyes.

"Why, it's Burt Ottman!" Penny whispered.

"And exactly on the dot of nine-fifteen," added Louise significantly. "He *must* be the person who lost that billfold!"

CHAPTER

12

JERRY'S DISAPPEARANCE

WITHOUT NOTICING Jerry and the girls, Burt Ottman walked directly to a table at the other side of the dining room. He spoke to the stranger whom Penny and Louise had followed, and sat down opposite him.

"Ha! The plot thickens!" commented Jerry in an undertone. "Obviously our friend and Burt Ottman had an appointment together."

"This is certainly a shock to me," declared Penny. "I'd made up my mind that Burt had nothing whatsoever to do with the dynamiting. Now I don't know what to think."

"He must be the saboteur," Louise said, speaking louder than she realized. "We picked up the billfold along the river and it undoubtedly was his."

"He denied it," replied Penny. "However, when I spoke of The Green Parrot I noticed that he seemed to recognize the name. Oh, dear!"

"Now don't take it so hard," Jerry comforted her.

"The best thing to do is to report what we've seen to police and let them draw their own conclusions."

"I suppose so," Penny admitted gloomily. "I had hoped to help Sara and her brother."

"You wouldn't want to protect a saboteur?"

"Of course not, Jerry. Oh, dear, it's all so mixed up."

So intent had the young people been upon their conversation that they failed to observe a waiter hovering near. Nor did it occur to them that he might be listening. As Jerry chanced to glance toward him, he bowed, and moving forward, presented the bill.

"Howling cats!" the reporter muttered after the waiter had discreetly withdrawn. "Will you look at this!"

"How much is it?" Penny asked anxiously. "We only had three ham sandwiches."

"Two dollars cover charge. Three sandwiches, one dollar and a half. Tip, fifty cents. Grand total, four dollars, plus sales tax."

"Why, that's robbery!" Penny exclaimed. "I wouldn't pay it, Jerry."

"I can't," he admitted, slightly abashed. "I only have three dollars in my pocket. Then I'll have to buy my hat back from the checkroom girl."

"Louise and I haven't any money either," Penny said. "Thirty-eight cents to be exact."

"Thirty-three," corrected her chum.

"Tell you what," said Jerry after a moment of thought. "You girls stay here and hold down the chairs. I'll go outside and telephone one of the boys at the office. I'll have someone bring me some cash."

Left to themselves, the girls tried to act as if nothing were wrong. However, they were very conscious of the waiter's scrutiny. Every time the man entered the dining room with a tray of food, he gazed suggestively at the unpaid bill.

"I'd feel more comfortable under the table," Penny commented. "Why doesn't Jerry hurry?"

"Perhaps he can't find a telephone."

"Something is keeping him. We're going to become conspicuous if we stay here much longer."

The girls fumbled with their purses and sipped at their water glasses until the tumblers were empty. Minutes passed and still Jerry did not return.

After a while, Burt Ottman's companion left the dining room. The young owner of the boat dock waited until the older man had vanished, and then called for his check. If the bill were unusually large he did not appear to notice, for he paid it without protest and likewise left the dining room.

"Louise, I don't want to stay here any longer," Penny said nervously. "I can't understand what's keeping Jerry."

"Why not go out to the foyer and look for him."

"A good idea if we can get away with it," Penny

approved. "I judge though, that if we start off, the waiter will pursue us with the bill."

"Couldn't we just explain?"

"We can try. Anyway, it will be interesting to see what will happen."

Before leaving the table, Penny scribbled a hasty note which she left for Jerry on his plate. It merely said that the girls would wait for him in the foyer. Choosing a moment when their own waiter was occupied at another table, they sauntered across the room and out into the hall.

"That wasn't half as hard as I thought it would be," chuckled Penny. "But where's Jerry?"

The foyer was deserted. Noticing a stairway which led to a lower level, the girls decided that the telephones must be located below. They started down, but soon realized their mistake for no light was burning in the lower hall.

"We're not supposed to be down here," Louise murmured, holding back.

"Wait!" whispered Penny.

At the far end of the dingy hall she had glimpsed a moving figure. For just a second she thought that the young man might be Jerry. Then she saw that it was Burt Ottman.

"What do you suppose he's doing down here?" she speculated. "He seems to be familiar with all the nooks and crannies of this place."

Burt Ottman had not seen or heard the girls. They saw him pause at the end of the hall and knock four times on a closed door. A circular peep-hole shot open and a voice muttered: "Who is it?"

The girls heard no more. Someone touched Penny on the shoulder from behind. With a startled exclamation, she whirled around to face the head waiter.

"So sorry, Mademoiselle, to have frightened you," he said blandly. "You have taken the wrong stairway."

"Why, yes," stammered Penny, trying to collect her wits. "We were looking for the public telephones."

"This way please. You will find them in the foyer. Just follow me."

Penny and Louise had no choice but to obey. They wondered if the head waiter knew how much they had seen. His expressionless face gave them no clue.

"We were waiting for our friend," Louise remarked to cover her embarrassment.

"The young man who escorted you here?"

"Yes," nodded Louise. "He went to telephone and we haven't seen him since."

The waiter had reached the top of the stairs. He turned and looked directly at the girls as he said: "The young man left here some minutes ago."

"He left!" Penny exclaimed incredulously. "But the bill wasn't paid."

"Oh, yes, the young gentleman took care of it."

"Why, Jerry didn't have enough money," Penny protested, unable to grasp the situation. "You're sure he left the cafe?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

"And didn't he leave any message for us?"

"I regret that he did not," the waiter replied. "As young ladies without escorts are not permitted at The Green Parrot, I suggest that you leave at once."

"You may be sure we will," said Penny. "I simply can't understand why Jerry would go off without saying a word to us."

The head waiter conducted the girls to the exit, bowing as he closed the door in their faces. Rather bewildered, they huddled together on the stone steps. Rain had started to fall once more and the air was unpleasantly cold.

"We certainly got out of that place in a hurry," Louise commented. "If you ask me, it was a shabby trick for Jerry to go off and leave us. Especially when he knew we didn't have the price of a taxi."

"Lou," said Penny soberly, "I don't believe that Jerry did desert us."

"But he disappeared! And the head waiter told us that he left."

"Something happened to Jerry when he went to telephone—that's certain," replied Penny, thinking aloud.

"Then you believe he was forcibly ejected?"

"No one could have tossed Jerry out of The Green Parrot without a little opposition."

"Jerry's quite a scrapper when he's aroused," Louise agreed. "We didn't hear any sound of scuffling. What do you think became of him?"

"I don't know and I'm worried," confessed Penny. Taking Louise's arm, she guided her up the stone steps to the street. "The thing for us to do is to get home and tell Dad everything! Jerry may be in serious trouble."

CHAPTER

13

A VACANT BUILDING

HASTENING TO a main street, Penny and Louise waited many minutes for a bus. Finally as a taxi cruised past they hailed it, knowing they could obtain cab fare when they reached home.

"Let's go straight to my house," Penny said, giving the driver her address. "Dad should be there by this time. I know he'll be as worried about Jerry as we are."

A few minutes later the taxi drew up in front of the Parker home. Lights burned in the living room and the girls were greatly relieved to glimpse the editor reading in a comfortable chair by the fireplace.

"Dad, I need a dollar sixty for cab fare!" Penny announced, bursting in upon him.

"A dollar sixty," he protested, reaching for his wallet. "I thought you and Louise went to a picture show. What have you been doing in a taxicab?"

"I'll explain just as soon as I pay the driver. Please, this is an emergency."

Mr. Parker gave her two dollars and she ran outside with it. In a moment she came back with Louise.

"Now, Penny, suppose you explain," suggested Mr. Parker. "Has walking become an outmoded sport or are you trying to save wear and tear on rayon stockings?"

"Dad, Louise and I never went to the Rialto Theatre," Penny said breathlessly. "We've been at The Green Parrot!"

"*The Green Parrot!*"

"Oh, we didn't go alone," Penny explained hastily as she saw disapproval written on her father's face. "We telephoned Jerry and had him accompany us."

"How did you learn the location of the place?"

"We heard a man give the address to a taxi driver, and followed in another cab. Dad, we saw Burt Ottman there!"

"Interesting, but it hardly proves that he is a saboteur."

"He arrived at exactly nine-fifteen," Penny resumed excitedly. "After talking with that man we followed, they both left the dining room, though not together. We saw Burt go downstairs and knock on a door which had a peephole."

"Did he enter?"

"I don't know," Penny admitted. "Louise and I weren't able to see. Just as things were getting inter-

esting the head waiter came and politely escorted us out of the building."

"Why didn't Jerry bring you home?"

"That's what I'm getting at, Dad. Jerry just disappeared."

"What do you mean, Penny?"

Together the girls told him exactly what had happened at The Green Parrot. Mr. Parker promptly agreed that it would not be like Jerry to leave the cafe without an explanation.

"Something has happened to him!" Penny insisted soberly. "Dad, why don't you call the police right away? It wouldn't surprise me one bit if The Green Parrot is a meeting place for saboteurs! There's no telling what they may have done to Jerry!"

By this time Mr. Parker had begun to share the alarm of the girls. Getting abruptly to his feet, he started toward the telephone. Before he could take down the receiver, the bell jingled. Answering the incoming call, a peculiar expression came over the newspaper owner's face. After talking for a moment, he hung up the receiver and turned toward Penny.

"That was Jerry," he announced dryly.

"Jerry!" Penny became confused. "But I don't understand, Dad. Is he being held at The Green Parrot?"

"Jerry is at home. He called to ask if you and Louise arrived safely."

"Well, of all the nerve!" Penny cried indignantly. "Just wait until I see him again!"

"Not so fast," advised her father. "There seems to have been a little mix-up. After Jerry left the dining room to telephone, the head waiter told him that you girls had decided not to wait."

"And he told us that Jerry had gone!" Louise cried. "I wonder why?"

"Because he wanted to get rid of our entire party!" Penny declared. "All the time we were in the cafe that head waiter seemed to keep his eye on us. Dad, what did Jerry do about paying the bill?"

"He was told that he need not settle it—that he could pay later."

"Well, it's all very peculiar," Penny said with a sigh. "I'm glad Jerry is safe, but I still maintain we were hustled out of that place."

"No doubt you were," agreed her father. "I'm curious to see the cafe—especially that door with the peep hole."

"I'll take you there," Penny offered eagerly.

"Not tonight," Mr. Parker declined, yawning. "Tomorrow morning perhaps."

Penny had to be satisfied with the decision, though she yearned for immediate action. After Louise had

gone to her own home, she mulled over the situation, discussing every angle of it with her father.

"Why do you think Burt Ottman was at the Parrot?" she tried to pin him down. "Would you say he's one of the plotters?"

"I have no opinion whatsoever," Mr. Parker responded somewhat wearily.

Penny did not allow her father to forget his promise to visit The Green Parrot. The following morning she awoke early and at the breakfast table reminded him that they had an important appointment together.

"I should be at the office," Mr. Parker said, glancing at his watch. "Besides, the cafe won't be open at this hour."

"The manager should be there, Dad. You'll be able to talk to him and really look over the place."

"We can ask a few questions—that's all," Mr. Parker corrected. "One can't walk into an establishment and start searching."

"Let's go anyway," pleaded Penny.

More to please her than because he hoped to uncover vital evidence, Mr. Parker agreed to make the trip. With Penny at the wheel of the family car, they drove to the street where The Green Parrot was situated. Parking not far from the entrance to an alley, they walked the remaining distance.

"This is the place," said Penny, pausing before the familiar building. "Why, what's become of the cafe?"

Bewildered, she stared at the doorway where the painted parrot sign had swung. It was no longer there and the Venetian blinds had been removed from the window.

"This place doesn't have the appearance of a cafe," said Mr. Parker. "Are you sure you have the correct address, Penny?"

"Why, yes, I know we came here last night. But the sign has been removed."

Descending the stone steps, Penny pressed her face against the uncovered windows. Only a large, empty room confronted her astonished gaze. All of the tables and chairs had been removed, even the palm trees and decorations.

"It's deserted, Dad!" she exclaimed.

Mr. Parker came down the steps to peer through a window. Bits of colored paper and menu cards still littered the floor. Testing the door, he found it locked.

"This certainly is strange," he remarked thoughtfully. "Let's inquire next door."

Penny and her father chose to enter a bakery which adjoined the building. A stout woman in a white apron, who was arranging frosted cakes in a showcase, favored them with a professional smile.

"Good morning," Mr. Parker greeted her, removing his hat. "Can you tell me what has become of the cafe next door?"

"Are you from the police?" the woman asked quickly.

"No, I'm connected with the *Star*."

"Oh, a reporter!" assumed the woman, and Mr. Parker did not correct her. "I thought maybe you were from the police. Yesterday I saw a man watching The Green Parrot and I said to my husband, Gus, 'The cops are going to raid that place.' "

"And did they?" interposed Mr. Parker.

"Not that I know of. The outfit just moved out. And a queer time to be doing it too, if you ask me!"

"When did they leave?"

"The van pulled up there about two o'clock last night. They were loading stuff in until almost dawn."

"Can you tell me where they went or why they moved out?"

"No, I can't," the woman replied with a shrug. "Like as not they were afraid the police were going to raid 'em. I'm telling you that place deserved to be closed up."

"Just what went on there?"

"I never was inside the place, but some mighty queer acting people seemed to be running it. Why,

I've seen men go in and out of there at four o'clock of a morning, hours after the cafe closed up."

"Foreigners?"

"I couldn't rightly say as to that. My husband, Gus, thinks a lot of gambling went on. Anyway, I'm glad the outfit's gone."

Unable to learn more, Penny and her father left the bakery and walked toward their parked car. The information they had gained was not likely to prove very helpful. Obviously, The Green Parrot had closed its doors, fearing an investigation. Whether it had moved elsewhere or gone out of existence, they could not know.

"The call that Jerry, Louise and I paid there last night may have had something to do with it," Penny remarked. "I know the head waiter was eager to be rid of us."

As Mr. Parker and his daughter walked slowly along, several persons ran past them toward an alley. Approaching its entranceway, they saw that a throng of people had gathered not far from the rear exit of The Green Parrot.

"Wonder what's wrong back there?" speculated Mr. Parker, pausing. "Probably an accident of some sort."

"Let's find out," proposed Penny.

She and her father joined the group of excited men and women in the alley. They were startled to see a

young man sprawled face downward on the brick pavement. A garbage collector jabbered excitedly that he had found the victim lying thus only a moment before.

Mr. Parker pushed through the circle of people. "Has anyone called an ambulance?" he asked.

"I'll send for one, Mister," offered a boy, hastening away.

Mr. Parker bent over the prone figure.

"He ain't dead is he?" the garbage man asked anxiously.

"Unconscious," replied the newspaper man, his fingers on the victim's wrist. "A nasty head wound. I'd say he either fell or was struck from behind."

Carefully Mr. Parker rolled over the limp figure. As he beheld the face, he stared and glanced quickly at Penny.

"Who is he, Dad?" she asked, and then she saw for herself.

The young man was Burt Ottman.

CHAPTER

14

TEST BLACKOUT

AS MR. PARKER covered Burt Ottman with his overcoat, the young man stirred and opened his eyes. He gazed at the newspaper owner with a dazed expression and for a moment did not attempt to speak.

"Take it easy," Mr. Parker advised.

"What happened to me?" the young man whispered.

"That's what we'd like to know. Were you struck?"

"Don't remember," Ottman mumbled. He closed his eyes again, but aroused as he heard the shrill siren of an approaching ambulance. "Don't let 'em take me to a hospital," he pleaded. "Take me home."

The ambulance drew up in the alley. Stretcher bearers carefully lifted the young man.

"I'm all right," he insisted, trying to sit up. "Just take me home."

"Where's that?" asked one of the attendants.

Burt Ottman mumbled an address which was on a street not far from the boat dock he operated.

"We'll take you to the hospital for a check up," the young man was told. "Then if you're okay, you'll be released."

Deeply interested in the case, Mr. Parker and Penny followed the ambulance to City Hospital. There, after an hour's wait in the lobby they were told that Burt Ottman had suffered no severe injury. A minor head wound had been dressed, and he was to be released within a short while.

"What caused the accident?" Mr. Parker asked one of the nurses. "Did the young man say?"

"He couldn't seem to remember what happened," she replied. "At least he wouldn't talk to the doctor about it."

Overdue at the *Star* office, Mr. Parker could remain no longer. However, Penny, whose time was her own, loitered about the lobby for an hour and a half until Burt Ottman came down in the elevator. The young man's head was bandaged and he walked with an unsteady step as he leaned on the arm of a nurse.

"I'll call a taxi for you," the young woman said. "You're really in no condition to walk far, Mr. Ottman."

Penny stepped forward to offer her services. Her

father, knowing that she might have use for the car, had left it parked outside the hospital.

"I'll be glad to take Mr. Ottman home," she volunteered.

The young man protested that he did not wish to cause anyone inconvenience, but allowed himself to be guided to the waiting automobile.

As the car sped along toward the riverfront, Penny stole quick glances at Burt. He sat very still, his gaze on the pavement ahead. She half expected that he would offer an explanation of the accident, or at least ask a few questions, but he remained silent.

"You took rather a hard blow on the head," she remarked, seeking to lead him into conversation.

Burt merely nodded.

"Dad and I were astonished to find you lying in the alley at the rear of The Green Parrot," Penny went on. "Don't you remember how you came to be there?"

"Mind's a blank."

"You must have been struck by someone," Penny said, refusing to be discouraged. "Can't you recall whom you were with just before the accident?"

"What is this, a third degree?" Burt asked, and only a faint, amused smile took the edge from his question.

"I'm sorry," Penny apologized.

"It doesn't matter what happened to me," Burt said quietly. "I just don't feel like talking about it—see?"

"Yes."

"I don't mean to seem unappreciative," the young man resumed. "Thanks for taking me home."

"You're very welcome, I'm sure," Penny responded dryly.

The car drew up in front of the home where Burt and his sister lived. A pleasant, one-story cottage rather in need of paint, it was situated high on a bluff overlooking the river.

As Burt stiffly alighted from the car, the cottage door opened, and Sara came running to meet him.

"You're hurt!" she cried anxiously. "Oh, Burt, what happened to you?"

"Nothing," he answered, moving away from her encircling arms.

"But your head!"

"Your brother was hurt sometime last night," Penny explained to Sara. "Just how, we don't know. My father and I found him lying in an alley at the rear of The Green Parrot."

"The Green Parrot—that night club!" Sara gazed at her brother in dismay. "Oh, Burt, I was afraid something like this would happen. Those dreadful men—"

"Now Sara," he interruped brusquely. "No the-

atricals, please. Everything's all right." Giving her cheek a playful pinch, he wobbled past her into the cottage.

Sara turned frightened eyes upon Penny. "Tell me exactly what happened," she pleaded.

"I honestly don't know, Sara. My father thought someone must have struck your brother from behind, but he's not told us a thing."

"I just knew something of the sort would happen," Sara repeated nervously.

"What do you mean?" inquired Penny. "Does your brother have enemies who would harm him?"

"Burt's been trying to find out who framed him in the bridge dynamiting. He won't tell me much about it, but I know he's been trailing down a few leads."

"Isn't that work for the police?"

"The police!" Sara retorted bitterly. "Their only interest is in piling up more evidence against Burt!"

"Your brother knows the identity of the saboteur?"

"He won't tell me, but I think he does have an idea who blew up the bridge."

Penny scarcely knew whether or not to accept Sara's explanation of her brother's activities. Unquestionably, the girl believed that he was innocent of all charges against him. For one not prejudiced in his favor, there were many factors to be considered. Why had Burt denied losing the leather billfold?

And with whom had he kept the Tuesday night appointment at The Green Parrot?

"If your brother has any clue regarding the real saboteur, he should present his evidence to the police," Penny advised Sara.

"He'll never do that until he's ready to appear in court. Not after the way the police treated him."

Penny realized that nothing was to be gained by discussing the matter further with Sara. Offering a few polite remarks to the effect that she hoped Burt would soon recover completely from his injury, she drove away.

Later, in repeating the conversation to her father, she declared that she could not make up her mind regarding Burt Ottman's guilt.

"The case does have interesting angles," Mr. Parker acknowledged. "I talked to the Police Commissioner this morning about The Green Parrot. The place long has had a reputation for cheating customers, and lately its been under suspicion as a rendezvous for anti-American groups."

"That would fit in with what the bakery woman told us. What became of The Green Parrot, Dad? Have the police been able to trace it to a new location?"

"Not yet. The cafe may not open up again, or if it does, under a new name."

For two days Penny divided her time between

school and the river. As the water remained too rough for safe sailing, she and Louise spent their spare hours painting and cleaning their boat. Upon several occasions they called at the Ottman Boat Dock. Burt never was there, but Sara assured them that her brother had completely recovered from his recent mishap.

"Did he never tell you how he was struck?" Penny inquired once.

"Never," Sara returned. "I've given up talking to him about it."

With the river high, the girls had no opportunity to visit Old Noah at his ark. However, Sara told them that she was quite certain Sheriff Anderson had not succeeded in getting rid of the old fellow and his animals.

"The ark is still anchored up Bug Run," she laughed ruefully. "I know because a steady flow of blue bottles has been floating down here!"

"Do you always read the message?" Louise inquired.

"Not always," Sara replied. "Frequently I do because they're so crazy."

Since his arrest and subsequent release from jail, Burt Ottman had seldom been seen at the boat dock. Harassed and overburdened, Sara endeavored to do the work of two people. She ran the motor launch, taking passengers up and down the river. She rented

canoes and row boats, and looked after repair work which came to the shop. If she felt that her brother was shirking his duties, she gave no inkling of it to the girls.

"When does Burt's trial come up?" Louise remarked to Penny late Thursday night as they walked home from the Public Library. "Next week, isn't it?"

"Yes, the twenty-first," her chum nodded. "From all I can gather, he'll be convicted, too."

"I feel sorry for Sara."

"So do I," agreed Penny. "At first I didn't like her very well. Now I know her brusque manner doesn't mean anything."

The girls were passing a drugstore. In the window appeared a colored advertisement, a picture of a giant chocolate soda, topped with frothy whipped cream. Penny paused to gaze longingly at it.

"That's a personal invitation addressed to me," she remarked. "How about it, Lou?"

"Oh, that same picture has been in the window for months," her chum said discouragingly. "You can't get whipped cream unless you steal it from a cow."

"Well, how about a dish of ice cream then? I'm horribly hungry."

"That's your natural state," teased Louise, pulling her on. "If we stop now, we'll be caught in the test blackout."

"Is there one tonight?"

"Don't you read the papers? It's to be held between nine and ten o'clock. And it's ten after nine now."

"I think it might be fun to be caught out in one—just so long as it's not the real thing."

"I want to get home before the street lights are turned out," Louise insisted. "In fact, I promised Mother I'd come straight home when the library closed."

"Oh, all right," Penny gave in reluctantly.

The girls began to walk faster for they were many blocks from their own street. Now and then they met an air raid warden and so knew that the time for the test blackout was close at hand.

"Louise!" Penny suddenly exclaimed, stopping short.

"Now what?" the other demanded. "Don't you dare tell me you've left something at the library!"

Penny was staring at a man who only a moment before had come through the revolving doors of the Hotel Claymore.

"See that fellow!" she said impressively.

"Yes, what about him?"

"He's the head waiter at The Green Parrot."

"Why, you're right!" Louise agreed. "For a minute I didn't recognize him in street clothes."

"Let's follow him," Penny proposed as the man

started down a side street. "Maybe we can learn the new location of The Green Parrot."

"Oh, Penny, I told Mother I'd come straight home."

"Then I'll follow him alone. I can't let this opportunity slip."

Louise hesitated, and then, unwilling to have Penny undertake an adventure alone, quickly caught up with her.

"There's no telling where this chase will end," she complained. "That man may not be going to The Green Parrot."

"Then perhaps we'll learn where he lives and police can question him."

As Penny spoke, a siren began to sound. A car which was cruising past, pulled up at the curb and its headlights went off. All along the street, lights blinked out one by one.

"The blackout!" Louise gasped. "I was afraid we'd be caught in it. Now we'll lose that man, and what's worse, I'll be late in getting home!"

CHAPTER

15

A DRIFTING BARGE

UPON HEARING the shrill notes of the air raid siren, the man whom Penny and Louise followed, quickened his step. Hastening after him, the girls turned a corner and came face to face with an air raid warden.

"Take shelter!" he ordered sternly. "The closest one is across the street—the basement of the Congregational Church."

Penny started to explain, but the warden had no time to listen. Waving the girls across the street, he watched to see that they actually entered the shelter.

"I guess he thought we weren't very cooperative," Louise remarked as they followed a throng of persons downstairs to the basement. "These blackout tests really are very important."

"Of course," agreed Penny. "It's a pity though that our friend, the waiter, couldn't have been sent into this same shelter. Now we'll lose him."

For nearly twenty minutes the girls remained in the basement until the All Clear sounded. As they returned to the street level, lights were going on again, one by one. Pedestrians began to pour out of the shelters, but the girls saw no one who resembled the waiter.

"We've lost him," sighed Penny. "I guess we may as well go home."

"Let's hurry," urged Louise who was glad to abandon the pursuit. "Mother will be worried about me."

At the Sidell home, Penny turned down an invitation to come in for a few minutes. As she started on alone, she paused and called to her chum who was on the porch: "Oh, Lou, how about a sail early tomorrow morning?"

"Isn't the river too high?"

"It was dropping fast this morning. The current's not so strong now either. Let's get up bright and early."

"How early?" Louise asked dubiously.

"Oh, about seven o'clock."

"That's practically the middle of the night," Louise complained.

"I'll come by for you at a quarter to seven," Penny said, as if the matter were settled. "Wear warm clothes and don't you dare keep me waiting."

The next morning heavy mists shrouded River-

view's valleys and waterfront. Undaunted by the dismal prospect, Penny proceeded in darkness to the Sidell home. There, huddling against the gate post, she whistled several times, and finally tossed a pebble against the window of Louise's room. A moment later the sash went up.

"Oh, is it you, Penny?" her chum mumbled in a sleepy voice. "You surely don't expect to go sailing on a morning like this!"

"The fog will clear away just as soon as the sun gets up. Hurry and climb into your clothes, lazy bones!"

With a groan, Louise slammed down the window. Ten minutes later she appeared, walking awkwardly because she wore two pair of slack suits and three sweaters.

"Think we'll freeze?" she inquired anxiously.

"You won't," laughed Penny, giving her a thermos bottle to carry.

By the time the girls reached the dock, the rising sun had begun to scatter the mist. Patches of fog still hung over portions of the river however, and it was impossible to see the far shore.

"Shouldn't we wait another hour?" Louise suggested as Penny leaped aboard the dinghy.

"Oh, by the time we get the sail up the river will be clear," she responded carelessly. "Toss me the life preserver cushions."

While Penny put up the mainsail, Louise wiped the seats dry of dew. Her fingers stiff with cold, she cast off the mooring ropes, and the boat drifted away from the dock.

"Well, the river is all ours this morning," Penny remarked, watching the limp sail. "That's the way I like it."

"Where's the breeze?" demanded Louise suspiciously.

"We'll get one in a minute. The headland is cutting it off."

"You're a chronic optimist!" accused Louise. Wetting a finger, she held it up. "I don't believe there is any breeze! We'll just drift down stream and then have to row back!"

"We're getting a little now," said Penny as the sail became taut. "Hold your fire, dear chum."

The boat gradually picked up speed, but the breeze was so unsteady that the girls did not attempt to cross the river. Instead, they sailed in midstream, proceeding toward the commercial docks. The mists did not entirely clear away and Penny began to shiver.

"Don't you wish you had one of my sweaters?" asked Louise, grinning.

Penny shook her head as she reached to pour herself a cup of steaming coffee from the thermos bottle. Before she could drink it, a large, flat vessel loomed up through the mist ahead.

"Now don't try to argue the right of way with that boat," Louise advised uneasily.

"Why, it's a barge!" Penny exclaimed, bringing the dinghy about. "I do believe it's adrift!"

"What makes you think so?" Louise asked, staring at the dark hulk.

Penny maneuvered the dinghy closer before she replied. "You can see it's out of control. There's no tow boat anywhere near."

"It does seem to be drifting," Louise acknowledged. "No one appears to be aboard either."

Realizing that the large vessel would block off all the wind if she approached too close to it, Penny kept the dinghy away. The barge, almost crosswise to the current, was floating slowly downstream.

"How do you suppose it got loose?" Louise speculated.

"Saboteurs may have cut the hawser."

"The big mooring rope *has* been severed!" Louise exclaimed a moment later. "I can see the frayed end!"

Penny came about again, tacking in closer to the drifting vessel.

"That certainly looks like the barge Carl Oaks was hired to guard," she declared with a worried frown. "Can you read the numbers, Lou?"

"519–9870."

"Then it is his barge!"

"He must have deserted his post again."

"In any case that barge is a great hazard to other vessels," Penny declared, deeply troubled. "Not even a signal light on the bow or stern!"

"Oughtn't we to notify the Coast Guards?"

"We should, but while we're reaching a telephone, the barge may ram another boat. Why not board her and put up signal lights first? In this fog one can't see a vessel many yards ahead."

"It doesn't look possible to climb aboard."

"I think I can do it," Penny said, offering the tiller to her chum. "Here, take the stick."

"You know what happens when I try to steer," Louise replied, shrinking back. "I'll be sure to upset. The wind always is tricky around a big boat."

"Then I'll take down the sail," Penny decided, moving forward to release the halyard.

The billowing canvas came sliding down. Penny broke out the oars, and maneuvered the dinghy until it grated against the hull of the barge.

"Even a trained monkey couldn't get up there," Louise declared, staring at the high deck.

Penny rowed around to the other side of the barge. Discovering a rope which did not give to her weight, she announced that she intended to climb it.

"You'll fall," Louise predicted.

"Why, I'm the champion rope climber of Riverview High!" Penny chuckled, thrusting the oars into

her chum's unwilling hands. "Just hold the dinghy here until I get back."

"Which shouldn't be long," Louise said gloomily. "I expect to hear your splash any minute now."

Penny grasped the dangling rope. With far more ease than she had anticipated, she climbed hand over hand to the deck of the barge. Once there she lost not a moment in lighting signal lamps at bow and stern. The task accomplished, she was moving amidships when she thought she heard a slight sound from within the deck house. Pausing to listen, she called:

"Is anyone here?"

There was no answer, but distinctly she heard a scraping noise, as if someone were pushing a chair against a wall.

"Someone *is* in there!" Penny thought.

Darting across the deck, she tried the door of the cabin. It had been fastened from the outside. Fumbling with the bolt, she finally was able to push it back. The door swung outward.

For a moment Penny could discern no one in the dark, little room. Then she saw a man lying on the floor. A gag covered his mouth and his hands and feet were tied with cord.

The prisoner was Carl Oaks.

CHAPTER

16

DANGER ON THE RIVER

THROWING THE door open wide to admit more light, Penny darted into the cabin. Bending over the prisoner, she began to untie the cords which bound his wrists.

"I'll have you free in a minute, Mr. Oaks," she encouraged him.

The cords had been loosely tied. Undoing the knots, she next pulled away the gag which covered his mouth.

"What happened, Mr. Oaks?" she demanded. "Who did this to you?"

The old watchman sat up, stretching his cramped arms. He did not reply, but watched Penny intently as she loosened the thongs which bound his legs. Getting up, he walked a step or two across the cabin.

"Tell me what happened," Penny urged impatiently. "Don't you feel able to explain?"

"I'm disgusted," Mr. Oaks returned. "Plumb disgusted."

"I don't doubt you feel that way," agreed Penny. "This barge is floating in mid-channel, a hazard to incoming and outgoing vessels. We'll have to do something about it."

"I'm through with this job! I didn't want it in the first place!"

"That's neither here nor there," Penny replied, losing patience. "Suppose you stop grieving over your bad luck for a minute, and explain what occurred."

"Well, it was about midnight when they sneaked aboard."

"The men who attacked you?"

"Yes, there were three of 'em. I was in the cabin at the time, reading my newspaper. Before I knew what was happening, they were on top of me."

"Did you recognize any of the men, Mr. Oaks?"

"No."

"What did they look like?"

"It was dark and I didn't see their faces."

"How were they dressed?"

"Didn't notice that either," Mr. Oaks returned grumpily. "I was too busy tryin' to fight 'em off. They trussed me up and then cut the barge loose."

"Saboteurs!"

"Reckon so," the old watchman nodded.

"Well, what will we do?" Penny asked, scarcely able to hide her growing irritation. "It's still foggy on the river. I've put up signal lights, but an ap-

proaching freighter might not see them in time to change her course."

"There's nothing more to be done," Carl Oaks responded with a shrug. "The Coast Guard boat will come along after awhile. I'm not going to worry about it—not me! I'm done with this lousy job, and you can tell your father so."

"My father can bear the shock, I think," Penny answered coldly.

Thoroughly disgusted at the indifferent attitude of the watchman, she ran out on deck. Looking down over the side, she saw Louise waiting anxiously in the dinghy.

"Oh, there you are!" her chum cried. "I thought you never were coming!"

Penny explained that she had found Carl Oaks lying bound and gagged inside the deck house. As the old watchman himself came up behind her, she could say nothing about his indifferent attitude.

"I wondered how you got out to this barge," Oaks commented, gazing down at the dinghy. "You can take me to shore with you."

"Isn't it your duty to remain here until relieved?" Penny asked.

"I resigned, takin' effect last night at midnight," Oaks grinned. "I've had enough of Riverview. I'm getting out of this town."

Penny faced the watchman with flashing eyes.

"My father obtained this job for you, Mr. Oaks. You'll show very little gratitude if you run off just because you're in trouble again."

"A man's got a right to do as he pleases!"

"Not always," Penny corrected. "Saboteurs are at work along this waterfront, and it's your duty to tell police what you know."

"I didn't see the men, I tell you! They came at me from behind."

"Even so, you may be able to contribute information to the police. In any case, you'll have to stay here until relieved—"

"Penny!" interrupted Louise from below. "There's a boat coming!"

The steady chug of a motor could be heard, but for a moment the swirling mists hid the approaching vessel. Then a pleasure yacht, with pennants flying, came into view.

"It's the *Eloise III!*" Penny cried, recognizing the craft as one belonging to Commodore Phillips of the Riverview Marine Club.

Waving their arms and shouting, the girls tried to attract the pilot's attention. To their relief, the yacht veered slightly from her course, and the engines slackened speed.

"Yacht ahoy!" called Penny, cupping hands to her lips.

"Ahoy!" came the answering shout from Commodore Phillips. "What's wrong there? Barge adrift?"

Penny confirmed the observation and requested to be taken aboard. Although she was not certain of it, she believed that the *Eloise III* was equipped with a radio telephone which could be used to notify Coast Guards of the floating barge.

Leaving Carl Oaks behind, the girls rowed to the yacht and were helped aboard. Commodore Phillips immediately confirmed that his vessel did have radio-telephone apparatus.

"Come with me," he directed, leading the girls to the radio room.

The Commodore sat down beside the transmitting apparatus, quickly adjusting a pair of earphones. Snapping on the power switch, he tuned to the wave length of the Coast Guard station. While the girls hovered at his elbow, he talked into the radio telephone, informing the Coast Guard of the floating barge and its position. The message, he explained to Penny and Louise, would be received in "scrambled speech" and automatically transformed into understandable English by means of an electrical device.

"How do you mean?" inquired Louise, deeply puzzled.

"Nearly all ship-to-shore radio telephone conversations are carried on in scrambled speech," the Com-

modore replied. "Otherwise, eavesdroppers could tune in on them and learn important facts not intended to be made public."

"But you spoke ordinary English into the 'phone," Louise said, still perplexed.

"The speech scrambler is an electric circuit which automatically transposes voice frequencies," the Commodore resumed. "The words are made unintelligible until unscrambled by a similar device at the receiving station. For instance, if I were to say 'Mary had a little lamb,' into this phone, anyone listening in would hear: 'Noyil hob e ylippey ylond.' Yet at the receiving post, the message would be unscrambled to its original form."

"I wish our telephone at home was fixed that way!" Penny declared with a laugh. "Wouldn't some of the neighbors develop a headache!"

Having been informed that a Coast Guard cutter would proceed at once to the locality, the girls felt relieved of further responsibility. As Commodore Phillips said that he would stand by with his yacht until the cutter reached the scene, they finally decided to return to shore. Once well away from the yacht they raised sail and tacked toward their own dock.

"I hope the Coast Guard gives Carl Oaks a good lecture," Penny remarked, turning to gaze back at

the slowly drifting barge. "Why, he wasn't one bit concerned what might happen to other vessels!"

"I never did like him," said Louise with feeling. "He complains too much. Was it his fault that the barge was cut adrift?"

"Not according to his story. Three men attacked him while he was in the deck house. Of course, he couldn't have been too alert."

"Carl Oaks wouldn't be!"

"There was one rather peculiar thing," Penny said slowly. "It never occurred to me until now."

"What's that?"

"Why, Mr. Oaks bonds were very loose. If he had tried, I believe he could have freed himself."

"That does seem strange," agreed Louise. "You don't think he allowed those saboteurs to board the barge?"

Penny brought the dinghy around, steering to avoid a floating log.

"I wouldn't know," she replied soberly. "But I'm glad we forced Mr. Oaks to wait for the Coast Guard. I hope they question him until they get to the bottom of this affair."

CHAPTER

17

A STOLEN BOAT

THE MISTS were lifting as Penny and Louise sailed slowly past the Ottman Dock toward their own snug berth. Sara, in blue slacks, a red bandana handkerchief over her head, was trying to start a stubborn outboard motor. Glancing up, she called a greeting, and then asked abruptly:

"Say, what's that barge doing out on the river? It looks to me as if it's adrift, but I can't see well enough to tell."

Penny and Louise, eager to impart information, brought the dinghy to a mooring at the floating platform. Sara listened with interest as they revealed how they had boarded the barge, released Carl Oaks, and then notified the Coast Guard.

"Neat work!" she praised. "That Carl Oaks! He's one of the most shiftless men I ever knew. He doesn't deserve to hold a job."

Penny glanced about the dock, searching for Burt Ottman.

"Your brother isn't here?" she remarked absently.

"No, he isn't," Sara replied, rather defiantly. "If you think he had anything to do with that barge—"

"Why, it never entered my mind!" Penny exclaimed.

"I'm sorry," the older girl apologized. "I shouldn't have said that. I don't know why I'm so jumpy lately."

"You have a great deal to worry you," said Louise sympathetically. "And you work too hard."

"I'll be all right as soon as Burt's trial is over. He's not here this morning—" Sara's voice broke. "In fact, I don't know where he is."

Louise and Penny said nothing, though the remark astonished them.

"Burt was out all last night." Sara spoke and then seemed to realize that her words easily could be misinterpreted. She added hastily: "He's been trying to gain evidence which will prove his innocence."

"You mean your brother went away yesterday and failed to return?" Penny asked after a moment.

Sara nodded. "He's on the trail of the real saboteurs, and it's dangerous business. That's why I'm so worried. I'm afraid he's in trouble."

"Have you talked to the police?" Penny inquired.

"Indeed, I haven't."

"Didn't your brother tell you where he was going when he left home?"

"No, he didn't. He keeps things from me because he says I worry too much now."

"I suppose he never explained what happened at The Green Parrot?"

"He said he couldn't remember. Oh, everything's so mixed up. I try not to think about it, because when I do my head simply buzzes."

Once more Sara tried to start the balky engine, and this time her efforts brought success.

"Thank goodness for small favors!" she muttered. "Now I've got to go out on the river and look for our stolen boat. Hope no one runs off with this place while I'm gone."

"You've not had another boat stolen?" Louise asked in surprise.

"I figure that's what happened to it. Late yesterday afternoon a man came here and rented our fastest motorboat. That's the last I've seen of him or it."

"Didn't you report your loss to the Coast Guards?" inquired Penny.

Sara answered with a trace of impatience. "Of course, I did. They searched the river last night. No accident reported, and no trace of the boat."

"The man might have drowned," Louise offered anxiously.

"It's not likely. If he had gone overboard, the boat would have been found by this time. No, it's been pulled up somewhere in the bushes and hidden. Last

year one of our canoes was taken. Burt found it a month later, painted a different color!"

"Didn't you know the man who rented the boat?" questioned Penny.

"Never saw him before. He was tall and thin and dark. Wore a brown felt hat and overcoat. I noticed his hands in particular. They were soft and well manicured. I said to myself, 'This fellow doesn't know a thing about boats,' but I was wrong. He handled that motor like a veteran."

"The man didn't look like a waiter, did he?" Penny asked quickly.

"You couldn't prove it by me."

Penny groped in her mind to recall a characteristic which definitely would describe the head waiter of The Green Parrot. To her chagrin, she could think of only one unusual facial characteristic, a tiny scar on his cheek. She did remember that the man had worn a large, old fashioned gold watch which might have been of foreign make.

"Why, the fellow who rented the boat did have such a watch!" Sara cried when Penny mentioned the timepiece. "I didn't notice the scar. What is his name?"

"Louise and I never were able to learn," Penny replied with regret. "The Green Parrot has closed its doors, so I don't know how you can get in touch with him."

Sara sighed. Placing an oar, a bailer, and a can of gasoline in the boat, she prepared to leave the dock.

"I'll be lucky if I ever see the fellow again," she commented. Hesitating a moment, she asked diffidently: "Don't suppose you girls would like to go along?"

Penny and Louise wondered if their ears had betrayed them. It seemed beyond belief that Sara actually would invite them to accompany her.

"Why, of course, we'd like to go," Penny accepted, before her chum could find her voice.

Scrambling out of the dinghy, the girls made it fast to the dock and transferred to the other boat. Sara opened the throttle, and they shot away, leaving behind a trail of churning foam. Out through the slip they raced, rounding a channel buoy at breakneck speed.

"You can certainly handle a boat," Penny said admiringly.

"Been at it since I was a kid," Sara grinned. "I could cruise this river blindfolded."

They passed the floating barge, observing that a Coast Guard cutter was proceeding up river to take it in tow. Turning upstream, Sara swung the boat toward shore.

"Keep close watch of the bushes," she directed the girls. "If you see anything that looks like a hidden boat, sing out."

At low speed they crept along the river, watching for marks in the sand which might reveal where a craft had been pulled out of water. Once, venturing too close in, Sara went aground and had to push off with the oars.

"It doesn't look as if we'll have any luck," she remarked gloomily. "The boat's probably so well hidden, it would take a ferret to find it."

They kept on upstream toward the Seventh Street Bridge, a structure much in use since the more modern Thompson's Bridge had been closed to auto traffic. Penny, watching the stream of vehicles passing above, remarked that Riverview commerce would be paralyzed should anything occur to damage it.

"The Seventh Street Bridge now is the only artery open to the Riverview Munitions Plant," Sara added. "I understand it's being guarded day and night. By a better watchman than Carl Oaks, I hope."

Without passing the bridge, the girls turned downstream, searching the opposite shore. Before they had gone far, Sara beached the boat on a stretch of sand.

"It was along here that Burt found our canoe last year," she explained. "If you don't mind waiting, I'll get out and prowl around a bit."

"Aren't we near Bug Run?" Penny inquired.

Sara pointed out the mouth of the stream which was hidden from view by a clump of willows.

"If you expect to be here a few minutes, Louise and I might pay Old Noah a flying visit," Penny said eagerly. "We're curious to learn what has happened to him."

"I'll be around for at least half an hour," Sara replied. "Take your time."

Penny and Louise set off along the twisting bank of Bug Run. Approaching the vicinity of the ark, they noticed many corked blue bottles caught amid the debris of the sluggish stream.

"I'll bet a cent and a half that Old Noah still is on the old stamping grounds!" Penny remarked. "Sheriff Anderson probably hasn't found a way to get rid of him. Why, unless a regular deluge floods this stream, the ark never could be floated out to the main river."

"The sheriff could put Old Noah in jail."

"True, but a great many people would criticize him if he did."

A moment later the girls rounded a bend and saw the ark in its usual setting. A long clothes line had been stretched from bow to stern, and wet garments fresh from the wash tub, flapped in the breeze.

"Well, Noah is still here," chuckled Penny. "He's run up the white flag though! Or should we say the white flags!"

On the deck of the ark, Old Noah was so busy that he failed to note the approach of the two girls. He

stood in the center of a ring of soiled clothes, laboring diligently over a tub of steaming suds.

As the girls reached the gangplank, a dog from inside the ark began an excited barking. Startled, Old Noah glanced up. Unnoticed by him, his long white beard slipped into the soapy water and he rubbed it vigorously on the washboard.

Scarcely able to control a giggle, Penny followed her chum aboard the ark. As Old Noah kept on scrubbing his beard she could not resist asking: "Excuse me, but aren't you washing your whiskers by mistake?"

Surprised, the old man straightened to his full height. Squeezing the dripping beard, he carefully wrung it out. Next he produced a comb from his loose fitting brown pantaloons, and painstakingly unsnarled the tangles. Then turning to the girls, he greeted them with his usual dignity.

"Good morning, my daughters. I am glad you kept your promise to visit me again."

"Good morning, Noah," responded Penny, trying not to laugh. "We thought we would drop by and see if you were still here. I remember Sheriff Anderson said he was going to call on you again."

The old man's weather beaten face crinkled into deep wrinkles. "Ho, ho! So he did, but he reckoned without the Might of the Righteous. I was watching for him when he came."

"I hope you didn't mistreat him," Penny said uneasily.

"When I observed his approach I untied my two hounds, Nip and Tuck, and hid myself in the forest. He was gone when I returned to the ark."

"Likewise, part of his anatomy, I suppose," commented Penny.

"Nip and Tuck did cause a commotion," Old Noah acknowledged, "but they did him no harm. When he went away the sheriff left a cowardly note tacked to a tree. It said he would return to dispossess me. Before that happens, I will blow this ark to Kingdom Come!"

"How will you do that?" inquired Penny, rather amused.

"With dynamite."

"Do you have any aboard the ark?"

Old Noah smiled mysteriously. "I know where I can lay my hands on all I'll need. When I was hiding in the woods yesterday, I saw where they keep it."

Penny and Louise glanced quickly at each other. While it was possible that Old Noah was talking wildly, the mention of dynamite made them uneasy. If it were true that he had come into possession of such a cache, then obviously it was their duty to report to the authorities.

"Who hid the dynamite?" Penny asked.

"I do not rightly know," replied Old Noah. "It

may have been those strangers who were pestering me last night. They came to my ark and were very nosey, asking me about this and that."

"Not officers?"

"They had no connection with the Law, speaking of it with great contempt."

"How many men were there, Noah?"

"Two."

"And they came by car?"

"Bless you, no," replied Noah wearily. "They arrived in a motorboat. Of all the pop-poppin' you ever heard! It almost drove my animals crazy."

"After they talked to you, the men went away again in their boat?"

"They started off, but as soon as they had turned the bend they switched out the motor. I wondered what they were up to, so I sneaked through the bushes and watched."

"Yes, go on!" Penny urged eagerly as Old Noah interrupted the narrative to wash another shirt. "What did the men do?"

"Why, nothing," answered the old man. "They just pulled the boat up into the bushes and went off and left it."

"The boat is still there?" Penny demanded.

"So far as I know, my daughter."

"Will you show us where the boat is hidden?" pleaded Penny. "And the dynamite cache too!"

"I am very busy now," Old Noah said, shaking his flowing locks. "I have this pesky washing to do, and then, there's all the animals to feed."

"Can't we help you?" offered Louise.

"I thank you kindly, but it would not be fit work for young ladies. If you will return tomorrow, I gladly will guide you to the place."

Penny and Louise tried their powers of persuasion, but the old man was not to be moved. In the end they had to be satisfied with a description of the site where the motorboat had been hidden. Old Noah stubbornly refused to tell them more about the cache of dynamite.

Finally, the girls said goodbye to the master of the ark, and hastened toward the river to join Sara. They were greatly excited by the information they had obtained.

"Old Noah may have talked for the fun of it," Penny declared as they struggled through the underbrush. "If not, I think we've stumbled into an important clue—one which may have a bearing on the bridge dynamiting case!"

CHAPTER

18

PENNY'S PLAN

SARA WAS waiting beside her boat when Penny and Louise came running along the muddy shore. Without apologizing for being so late, they excitedly related their conversation with Old Noah.

"Say, maybe that hidden motorboat is mine!" the girl exclaimed. "What did it look like?"

"We didn't take time to search for it," Penny replied. "We knew you would be waiting so we came straight here."

"Let's see if we can find it," Sara said, starting up the engine.

"Noah's animals don't like motorboats," Louise chuckled. "I suggest we do our searching afoot."

"All right," Sara agreed readily, switching the motor off again. "Lead and I'll follow."

Penny and Louise guided their companion to the mouth of Bug Run and thence along its slippery banks to a clump of overhanging willows.

"According to Old Noah's description, this should

be the place," Penny declared, looking about. "No sign of a boat though."

Sara took off shoes and stockings and waded through the shallow, muddy water. Whenever she came to a clump of bushes, she would pull the branches aside to peer behind them.

"Old Noah may have been spoofing us," Penny began, but just then Sara gave a little cry.

"Here it is! I've found it!"

Penny and Louise slid down the bank to the water's edge. Behind a dense thicket, a motorboat had been pulled out on the sand. The engine remained attached, covered by a piece of canvas.

"Is it your boat, Sara?" Penny asked eagerly.

"It certainly is!" She spoke with emphasis. "The hull has been repainted, but it takes more than that to fool me."

"Any positive way to identify it?"

"By the engine number. Ours was 985–877 unless I'm mistaken. I have it written down at home."

"What's the number of this engine?"

"The same!" Sara cried triumphantly after she had removed the canvas covering and examined it. "This is my property all right, and I shall take it back with me."

"Old Noah spoke of two strangers who came here last night by boat," Penny said thoughtfully.

"The fellow who stopped at the dock probably

picked up a pal later on," Sara commented, trying to shove the boat into the water. "My, this old tub is heavy! Want to help?"

"Wait, Sara!" Penny exclaimed. "Let's leave the boat here."

"Leave it here! Now that would be an idea! This little piece of floating wood represents nine hundred and fifty dollars."

"I don't mean that you're to lose the boat," Penny hastened to explain. "But if we take it now, we never will catch the fellow who stole it."

"That's true."

"If we leave the boat here we can keep watch of the place and catch those scamps when they come back."

"They may not come back," Sara said, without warming to the plan. "Besides, I've no time to do a Sherlock Holmes in the bushes. I have my dock to look after."

"Louise and I could do most of the watching."

"Well, I don't know," Sara said dubiously. "Something might go wrong. I never would get over it if I lost the boat."

"You won't lose the boat," promised Penny. "It's really important that we catch those two men, Sara. From what Old Noah said, they may be connected with the bridge dynamiting."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because Old Noah found a cache of dynamite somewhere near here."

"He won't tell us its location," added Louise.

"If it should develop that the men are saboteurs, we might learn something which would help your brother's case," Penny said persuasively. "How about it, Sara?"

"I'd be glad to risk the boat if I thought it would help Burt."

"Then let's leave it here. We can watch the spot night and day."

"And what will your parents have to say?"

Penny's face fell. "Well, I suppose when it comes right to it, Dad will set his foot down. But at least we can watch during the day time. Then if necessary, we might report to the police."

"Let's leave them out of it," Sara said feelingly. "If you girls will remain throughout the day, I'll stand the night watch."

"Not alone!" Louise protested.

"Why not?" Sara asked, amused. "I've frequently camped out along the river at night. Once I made a canoe trip the full length of the river just for the fun of it."

"Louise and I will stay here now while you return to the dock," Penny declared. "Better call our parents when you get there and break the news as gently as possible."

"What will you do for lunch?"

"Maybe we can beg a sandwich or a fried egg from Old Noah," Penny chuckled. "We'll manage somehow."

"Well, whatever you do, don't leave the boat unguarded," Sara advised, starting away. "As soon as it gets dark I'll come back."

Left to themselves, Penny and Louise explored the locality thoroughly. Not far away they found a log which offered a comfortable seat, and they screened it with brush.

"Now we're all ready for Mr. Saboteur," Penny said. "He can't come too soon to suit me."

"And just what are we going to do when he does arrive?"

"I forgot to figure that angle," Penny confessed. "We may have to call on Old Noah for help."

"Noah will be busy doing a washing or giving the goat a beauty treatment," Louise laughed.

The sun lifted higher, and steam rising from the damp earth made the girls increasingly uncomfortable. As the hours dragged by they rapidly lost zest for their adventure. Long before noon they were assailed by the pangs of hunger.

"If I could catch a bullfrog I'd be tempted to eat him raw," Penny remarked sadly. "How about chasing up to the ark? Noah might give us a nibble of something."

"Dare we go away and leave the boat?"

"Oh, it's safe enough for a few minutes," Penny returned. "The idea of staying here wasn't such a good one anyhow. What if those men should never come back?"

"This is a fine time to be thinking of that possibility!"

Moving quietly through the woods, the girls came to the ark. They could hear the hens cackling, and as they called Old Noah's name, the parrot answered, squawking: "Polly wants a cracker."

"You've got nothing on me, Polly," said Penny. "Where's your master?"

The old ark keeper was nowhere in evidence. Nor were the girls able to board the boat, for the gangplank had been removed.

"Now if this isn't a situation!" Penny exclaimed, exasperated. "It looks as if we're going to starve to death."

After lingering about the ark for a few minutes, they returned to their former hiding place. By this time they were so sorry for themselves that they could think of nothing but their discomfort. Belatedly, they recalled that Sara had smiled as she went away.

"She knew what we were up against staying here!" Penny declared. "Figured us for a couple of softies, I bet!"

"While everyone knows we're regular Commandos," Louise retorted sarcastically. "Why, if necessary we could go an entire day without eating."

"That's exactly what we will do," announced Penny with renewed determination. "I'll stay here until Sara comes if it kills me. But I hope you slug me if ever I get another idea like this."

"Don't worry, I will," promised Louise. "In fact, I may not wait that long!"

The hours dragged slowly on. All amusements failing them, the girls took turns sleeping. Twice they went to the ark, but Old Noah had not returned.

At last, as shadows lengthened, Louise and Penny were confronted with a new worry. It occurred to them that Sara might not expect to take over her duties until long after dark. The air had grown chilly, and hungry mosquitoes were swarming from their breeding places.

"Even my Mother doesn't seem concerned about me any more," Louise moaned, slapping at a foraging insect.

Penny glared at the motorboat snugly hidden in the underbrush. "If that thing weren't worth so much money, I'd certainly chuck this job. Even so, I'm just about desperate."

Louise, huddled against a tree trunk, suddenly straightened alertly. Placing a warning finger on her lips, she listened.

"Someone's coming, Penny!"

"Maybe it's Sara with a basket of food. I'd rather see her than a dozen saboteurs!"

"Keep quiet, you egg," Louise warned nervously.

Crouching low behind their shelter, the girls waited. They could hear a steady tramp, tramp of feet coming up the stream on their side of the bank.

"That's not Sara," murmured Penny. "She doesn't walk like an elephant. What'll we do if it should be a saboteur?"

"I'm scared," Louise chattered, hugging her chum's arm.

The footsteps came closer. Peering out through the screen of underbrush, the girls saw a young man coming straight toward their hiding place. In his hand he carried a safety-cap gasoline can.

"Who is he?" whispered Louise.

"Can't tell yet," Penny responded, straining her eyes to see. "He looks a little like—oh, my aunt! That's who it is—Bill Evans! Now what's he doing here?"

CHAPTER

19

STANDING GUARD

KEEPING LOW amid the underbrush, Penny and Louise waited and watched. Bill Evans did not see them although he approached within a few feet of their hiding place. With no hesitation, he went to the motorboat and began filling the tank with gasoline.

"Bill Evans, a thief and a saboteur!" Louise whispered. "I'll never get over it!"

"Bill hasn't the pep to be a saboteur," Penny muttered. "There's something wrong with this melodrama, and I'm going to find out about it right now!"

Before Louise could stop her, she arose from the underbrush to confront the dumbfounded young man.

"Bill Evans, what do you think you're doing?" she demanded sternly.

Bill nearly dropped the gasoline can. "Why, I'm filling this tank," he replied. "Why are you girls hiding behind that log?"

"Because we've been waiting to catch a motorboat thief! And you're it!"

"Now listen here!" said Bill, setting down the gasoline can. "You can't insult me, Miss Penny Parker! Just what do you mean by that crack?"

"This motorboat was stolen from Sara Ottman. You're filling the tank with gasoline, so you must expect to make a get-away to parts unknown."

"This boat belongs to Sara Ottman?" Bill demanded in amazement.

"It certainly does."

"You're kidding. It belongs to a Mr. Wessler."

"Who's he?" asked Penny. "I never heard of him."

"Well, neither did I until this afternoon," Bill admitted. "He gave me a dollar to come over here and fill the tank of this boat with gas. I'm only carrying out orders."

"Now we're getting somewhere," Penny declared with satisfaction. "How did you meet Mr. Wessler?"

"I was working on the dock, tinkering with my engine, when a man came up and started talking to me. He said he was a friend of Mr. Wessler who was planning a fishing trip. Then he told me where the boat was, and said he'd give me a dollar if I'd run over and fill the tank with gasoline."

"Didn't you think it a rather peculiar request?"

"Not the way the fellow explained it. Mr. Wessler

is a busy man and doesn't have time to look after such details."

"Mr. Wessler is afraid this locality is being watched, and he isn't taking any chances," Penny said soberly. "Bill, you've been assisting a thief!"

"Gee Whiskers!" Bill exclaimed, aghast. "I never thought about him not owning the boat. What should I do?"

"First of all, don't fill that tank with gasoline," Penny advised.

"It's about half full now."

"Can't you siphon it out?"

"Not without a tube, and I didn't bring one."

"You'll never in the world make a G-man," sighed Penny. "Well, at least you can describe the fellow who hired you."

Bill's brow puckered. "I didn't pay much attention," he admitted. "I'd say the fellow was about thirty-eight, with a little trick moustache."

"That can't be the man who originally rented the boat from Sara," Penny remarked, frowning.

"Say, are you really sure this boat belongs to the Ottmans?" Bill asked. "You know they're pretty badly tangled with the police. It said in the papers—"

"I know," interrupted Penny wearily. "Or do I know? I'm so mixed I feel like a perpetual motion machine running backwards."

"We've been watching here all day," Louise added, her voice quavering. "We've had nothing to eat. No wonder our minds are failing."

"Why don't you go home?"

"And let a saboteur run off with this boat?" Penny demanded. "We promised to stay here until Sara comes."

"Maybe she and her brother are pulling a fast one on you."

"I might think so, only this was my own idea," Penny answered. "Bill, did that man mention when his friend Wessler intended to go fishing?"

"No, he didn't."

"He might intend to use the boat tonight, and then again, perhaps not for several days. Say, Bill, how would you like to do your country a great service?"

"I'm aiming to enlist when I get through High School."

"This would be immediate service. Why not stay here and watch until Sara comes? It shouldn't be long."

"And what if those men should show up?"

"Just keep watch and see what they do. Of course, if they try to get away in the motorboat, you'll have to capture them."

"Oh, sure," Bill said sarcastically. "With my bare hands?"

"We won't leave you here long," Penny promised. "Louise and I haven't had a bite of food all day—"

"Okay, I'll do it," Bill gave in. "But see to it you're back here in an hour. Better bring the police too."

Learning that the young man had crossed the river in his own motorboat, the girls obtained permission to borrow it for the return trip. They found the craft at the mouth of Bug Run, and made a quick trip to the Ottman Dock.

"No one here," Penny observed as they alighted at the platform.

The boat shed was closed and locked. A small boy, loitering nearby, told the girls that he had not seen Sara Ottman for several hours.

"Now this is a nice dish of stew!" Penny exclaimed. "Where could she have gone? And why?"

"I know where I am going," announced Louise grimly. "Home! Be it ever so humble, there's no place like it when you're tired and hungry."

"But what about poor Bill? We can't expect him to stay in the woods all night."

"Well, there's a hamburger stand at the amusement park," Louise suggested after a moment. "We could go there for a sandwich. Then we might telephone home and request advice."

"Not a bad idea," Penny praised.

At the hamburger stand they ate three sandwiches each and topped off the meal with ice cream and pie. Seeking a public telephone, Penny then used a precious nickel to call her home. No one answered. Deciding that her father might be at the *Star* office, she phoned there. Informed that Mr. Parker was not in the building, she asked for Mr. DeWitt.

"DeWitt left the office a half hour ago," came the discouraging response.

"I wonder where I can reach him?"

"Can't tell you," was the answer. "Burt Ottman has skipped his bail, and DeWitt's upset about it. He may have gone to talk to his lawyer."

"What was that about Burt Ottman?" Penny asked quickly.

"He's disappeared—skipped town. Due for trial day after tomorrow, too. Looks like DeWitt is holding the bag."

Penny hung up the receiver, more bewildered than ever. Without taking time to repeat the conversation to her chum, she called Sara's home.

For a long while she waited, but there was no reply. At last, hanging up, she eyed the coin box, expecting her nickel to be returned. Though she jiggled the receiver many times and dialed to attract the operator's attention, the coin was not forthcoming.

"You've had no luck," said Louise, taking Penny's

place at the telephone. "Now it's my turn. I'll call home. Mother's always there."

She held out her hand, expecting a coin. Penny had nothing for her, and was forced to admit that she had used the last nickel on the preceding call.

"Then we have no bus money either!" gasped Louise.

"Stony broke—that's us."

"How can you be so cheerful about it?" Louise asked crossly. "We can't walk home—it would take us all night!"

"There's only one thing to do, Louise. We'll have to go back and talk to Bill. At least he should be able to loan us bus fare."

By this time the girls had lost all enthusiasm for saboteurs and sleuthing. As they recrossed the river in Bill's boat, they vowed that never again would they involve themselves in such a ridiculous situation.

"And just wait until I see Sara!" Penny added feelingly. "If I don't tear into her for playing a shabby trick on us!"

"She probably skipped town along with her brother," Louise replied. "I'm beginning to wonder if that motorboat we guarded so faithfully ever belonged to the Ottman's."

Landing not far from the mouth of Bug Run, the girls proceeded afoot to the site where Bill Evans last

had been seen. To their relief, he had not deserted his post. Cold, his face swollen by mosquito bites, he hailed them joyously.

"Thought you were never coming back! I'm getting out of here, and how!"

"What happened while we were gone?" Penny asked sympathetically. "Didn't Sara come?"

"No one has been here."

As Bill started away, the girls tried to dissuade him.

"I wouldn't stay here another hour if you'd give me the boat!" he retorted. "I'm going home!"

Jerking free from Louise who sought to hold him by main force, he moved off.

"At least telephone our folks when you get to Riverview!" Penny shouted indignantly. "Tell our parents that if they're still interested in their daughters to come and lift us out of this sink hole!"

"Okay, I'll do that," Bill promised. "So long."

After the sound of footsteps had died away, Louise and Jean sat down on the log and took stock of the situation.

"Any way you look at it, we're just a couple of goats," Penny said dismally. "It wouldn't be so bad if Old Noah would take us into his ark with the rest of the animals, but he's not at home."

"Sara played a trick on us, our parents went off and hid, and I don't think we can trust Bill too far," Louise sighed. "Why do we stay here anyway?"

"Well, something could have happened to detain Sara."

"I wish I could think so, but I can't. It would serve her right to lose this boat—if it actually is hers."

"Sara always seemed sincere and honest to me," Penny said, slapping furiously at a buzzing mosquito. "Until we have definite proof otherwise, I want to trust her."

"Even if it means staying here all night?"

"Well, my trusting nature has a limit," Penny admitted. "But surely our parents will come to rescue us before long."

"I wouldn't count on it," Louise returned gloomily. "Bill was in a bad mood when he left here."

The girls fell into a deep silence. They huddled together to keep warm, and slapped constantly at the insects. For a time it grew steadily darker, then a few stars brightened the patches of sky which could be seen through the treetops.

"Imagine explaining all this to Mother," Louise murmured once. "Why, it doesn't even make sense to me."

The noises of the forest began to annoy the girls. Overhead an owl hooted. Crickets chirped, and at frequent intervals a frog or a small animal would plop into the water.

"Listen, Lou!" Penny presently whispered. "I hear something coming!"

"Maybe it's a bear," Louise shivered.

"Silly! There aren't any bears in this part of the country."

"How do you know what sort of animals are around here?" Louise countered. "Maybe one escaped from Old Noah's zoo."

As the sound grew louder, the girls crouched low amid the brush. Through the trees they saw the gleam of a flashlight and distinguished the figure of an approaching man.

"It's probably my father!" Louise whispered, and started forward.

Penny jerked her back. "Bill hasn't had time to get to Riverview yet! This may be the big pay off!"

"A saboteur?"

Penny nodded, her gaze on the approaching figure. The man was tall and muscular and walked with a cat-like tread. He came directly to the motorboat, muttering under his breath as he examined the half empty fuel tank.

Straightening, he turned so that he faced the girls. For a fleeting instant Penny thought that he was Burt Ottman, and then she recognized her mistake. The man was the one who had rented Sara Ottman's boat —the head waiter of The Green Parrot.

CHAPTER

20

A SHACK IN THE WOODS

FEARING DETECTION, Louise and Penny remained motionless as the man stared in their direction. He did not see them, and after puttering about the boat for a few minutes, started off through the woods.

"Now what shall we do?" Louise whispered anxiously.

"Let's follow and find out where he goes," proposed Penny, stealing from her hiding place.

None too eager for the adventure, Louise nevertheless kept close beside her chum as they followed the stranger. Instead of returning to the main river, he chose a trail which led deeper into the woods. Coming soon to the ark which loomed dark and mysterious against a background of trees, he paused for a moment to gaze at it. Then he veered away from the well-trampled path, keeping on through the dense thickets.

"Don't you think we should turn back?" Louise whispered anxiously. "There's no guessing where we'll end up. We easily could get lost."

Penny was plagued by the same worry, but she bantered: "Why, Lou, your Scout leader would blush with shame to hear you say that! The woods stretch for only a few miles. We always can find our way out."

"What if our folks come searching for us while we're wandering around?"

"I try not to think of such unpleasant situations," Penny responded cheerfully. "You may be sure we'll have to do some tall explaining. But if this fellow we're tailing should prove to be a saboteur, everything will be lovely."

"That's not the word I'd use," Louise muttered.

The girls had fallen many yards behind the head waiter. Failing to see the flash of his light, they quickened their pace and for a minute or two feared they had lost him. But as they paused in perplexity, they again saw a gleam of light off to the right.

"Let's do less talking and more watching," Penny said, hastening on. "If we're not careful we'll lose that fellow."

Taking care to make no noise in the underbrush, the girls soon approached fairly close to the waiter. Apparently he knew his way through the woods, for not once did he hesitate. Occasionally he glanced overhead at dark clouds which were scudding across the sky. Reaching a small clearing, he paused to

look at a watch which he held close to his flashlight beam.

"What time do you suppose it is?" Louise whispered to her chum.

"Not very late. Probably about nine o'clock."

Because the waiter had paused, the girls remained motionless behind a giant oak. They saw the stranger switch off his light and gaze carefully about the clearing. In particular his attention centered upon a little shack, though no light showed there.

"Whose cabin is it?" whispered Louise. "Do you know?"

"I'm not sure," returned Penny. "I think it was built several years ago by an artist who lived there while he painted the ravine and river. But he moved out last winter."

The cabin was a curious structure, picturesquely situated beneath the low-spreading branches of an ancient tree. No windows were visible at the front, but a raised structure on the flat roof gave evidence of a large skylight.

After gazing at the shack for several minutes, the waiter raised fingers to his lips and whistled twice. To the surprise of the girls, an answering signal came from within the dark cabin.

A moment later, the front door opened, and an old man stepped outside.

"That you, Jard?" he called softly.

Without replying, the waiter left the shelter of trees to cross the clearing.

"Had any trouble?" he asked the old man.

"Everything's been going okay. I'll be glad to pull out o' here though."

The waiter made a reply which the girls could not hear. Entering the cabin, the men closed the door behind them.

"Who was that old man the waiter met?" Louise asked curiously. "Did you know him, Penny?"

"I couldn't see his face. He stood in the shadow of the door. His voice sounded familiar though."

"I thought so, too. What do you suppose those men are up to anyway?"

"Nothing good," Penny responded grimly.

The girls huddled together at the edge of the clearing, uncertain what to do. If a light had been put on inside the shack it did not show from where they stood.

"Why not go for the police?" Louise proposed hopefully.

"I have a hunch those men may not stay here long. By the time we could bring help, the place might be deserted. Besides, we haven't a scrap of real evidence against them."

"How about the stolen motorboat?"

"We're not even sure about that, Lou. Sara and

her brother both have disappeared. Accusing a man falsely is a very serious offense."

"Then what are we to do?" Louise asked despairingly. "Just stand here and wait until they come outside?"

"That's all we can do—unless—"

"Unless what?" Louise demanded uneasily as Penny interrupted herself.

"Lou, I have a corking idea! See how those tree limbs arch over the roof of the shack? Why, that old maple is built to our order!"

"I don't follow you."

"You will in a minute if you're a good climber!" chuckled Penny. "We can get up that tree and onto the roof. Even if it shouldn't have a skylight we can see through, at least we can hear what's being said."

"Let's just wait here."

"And learn nothing," Penny said impatiently. "How do you expect ever to be a G woman if you don't start practicing now?"

"I'm going to be a nurse when I grow up. Climbing trees won't help me at that."

"Then wait here until I get back," Penny said, starting across the clearing.

As she had known, her chum could not bear to be left alone in the dark woods. Louise hastened after her and together they crept to the base of the scraggly old maple.

The branches were so low that Penny pulled herself into them without difficulty. She then helped Louise scramble up beside her. They clung together a moment, listening to make certain that no sound had betrayed them.

"So far, so good," Penny whispered jubilantly. "Now to get onto the roof. And it does have a skylight!"

"We'll probably tumble through it," Louise muttered.

A dim light, which came from a candle, burned inside the shack. Nevertheless, from their perch on the overhanging limb, the girls were unable to see what was happening below. Penny decided to lower herself to the roof.

"Put on your velvet shoes," she warned as she swung lightly down from the lower branch. "The slightest noise and we're finished."

Dropping on the flat roof, she waited a moment, listening. Satisfied that the men inside the shack had not heard her, she motioned for Louise to follow. Her chum however, held back, shaking her head vigorously.

Abandoning the attempt to get Louise onto the roof, Penny crept toward the skylight. Lying full length, she pressed her face against the thick glass.

In the barren room below a candle burned on a table. The head waiter whom Penny first had seen

at The Green Parrot sat with his legs resting on the fender of a pot-bellied stove. Opposite him was the older man whose face she could not immediately see.

"I tell you, I'm getting worried," she heard the old fellow say. "When the Coast Guards took me off that coal barge they gave me the third degree. I can't risk having anything hung on me."

Penny pressed her face closer to the glass. Her pulse pounded. She was certain she knew the identity of the old man.

"I wish he'd turn his head," she thought. "Then I'd be sure."

As if in response to the unspoken desire, the old man shifted in his chair. The light of the candle flickered on his face, and Penny saw it clearly for the first time.

"Carl Oaks!" she whispered. "And to think that I ever helped him!"

CHAPTER

21

THROUGH THE SKYLIGHT

GREATLY EXCITED to learn that the old watchman and the waiter of The Green Parrot were fellow conspirators, Penny strained to catch their words. She heard the waiter reply:

"You've done good work, Oaks. All you have to do now is sit tight for a few more hours. We'll give you a five hundred dollar bonus if the job comes off right."

"That won't do me any good if I end up in jail."

"Nothing will go wrong. Everything has been planned to the last detail."

"I'm already in bad with the police," the old watchman whined. "I wouldn't have gone in with you if I'd known just what I was doing."

"You got your money for the Thompson bridge job, didn't you?"

"A hundred dollars."

"It was more than you earned," the other replied irritably. "All you had to do was let me get away

after I dynamited the bridge. You blamed near shot off my head!"

"I had to make it look as if I was doin' my duty. Those girls were watching me."

"That Parker pest came snooping around at The Parrot," the waiter said, letting the tilted chair legs thud on the floor. "Brought a reporter with her too. I got rid of 'em in short order."

"She didn't act very friendly when she found me bound and gagged aboard the coal barge," Carl Oaks resumed. "I think she may have suspected that it was a put up job. That's why I want to get out o' town while the getting is good."

"You can leave after tonight. We blast the Seventh Street bridge at one o'clock."

"And what about this prisoner I've been nurse-maiding?"

"We'll plant enough evidence around the bridge to cinch his guilt with the police. Then we'll dump him in Chicago where he'll be picked up."

"He's apt to remember what happened and spill the whole story."

"Even if he does, the police won't believe him," the waiter said. "They'll figure he's only trying to get out from under. Anyway, we'll be in another part of the country by then."

"What time will you pick me up here?" the watchman asked.

"Ten minutes till one. The automobile will arrive right on the tick, so synchronize your watch."

The two men compared timepieces, and then the waiter arose.

"Let's look at the prisoner," he said. "Is he still out cold?"

"He was the last time I looked at him. Hasn't moved since he was brought here, except once to ask for water."

The watchman went across the room to a closet and opened the door. A man lay on the floor, his hands and feet loosely bound. No cloth covered his face. Peering down from above, Penny was able to discern his features, and it gave her a distinct shock as she recognized him.

The waiter prodded the prisoner with his foot. The man who was bound, groaned and muttered, but made no other sign of consciousness.

"He'll not bother you tonight, Oaks," he said. "One of the boys can help you lift him into the car."

"I don't like this business," the watchman complained again. "What if his skull should be fractured?"

"He'll be okay by tomorrow," the waiter answered indifferently. "Heflanz gave him a little too much with the blackjack."

Penny waited to hear no more. Creeping cautiously away from the skylight, she returned to her

chum who remained perched precariously on the overhanging tree branch.

"Learn anything?" Louise demanded in a whisper.

"Did I? Lou, that old man is Carl Oaks! He and our waiter friend have a prisoner inside the cabin."

"A prisoner! My gracious! Then they must be saboteurs!"

"They're planning to blow up the Seventh Street Bridge at one o'clock," Penny went on tersely. "And they aim to blame it all on Burt Ottman!"

"He's not one of the outfit then?"

"Seemingly not. They have him trussed up inside a closet. Lou, you've got to hot-foot it to town and bring the police!"

"Come with me," Louise pleaded, frightened at the mere thought of going through the dark woods alone.

"One of us ought to stay and keep watch. I'll go if you're willing to remain."

"No, I'll go," Louise decided.

With nervous haste she started to descend the tree. Midway down, her hand loosened its hold, and she slipped several feet. Although she uttered no cry, she did make considerable noise. Penny, still on the roof of the shack, heard Carl Oaks exclaim:

"What was that? I hear someone outside!"

Realizing that her chum was certain to be seen, Penny called to her: "Run, Lou! As fast as you can!"

Her own position now had become untenable. It was too late to regain the tree branch. Darting to the roof edge, she swung herself down with her hands and dropped six feet to the ground.

The door of the cabin swung open. Penny had leaped from the rear side of the building, and so was not immediately seen. The two men started after Louise who in panic had run toward the woods.

To divert attention from her hard pressed chum, Penny gave a wild Indian whoop. Startled, the men stopped, and turned around. Carl Oaks at once took after her, while the waiter resumed pursuit of Louise.

Penny did not find it hard to keep well ahead of the watchman. Darting into the woods, she circled, hoping to rejoin her chum. She knew that Louise was not very fleet of foot, and once confused, might never find her way out of the forest.

By frequently pausing to listen to the crackle of underbrush, Penny was able to follow the flight of her chum. Instead of running toward the river, Louise seemed to be circling back in the direction of the shack.

"She'll get us both into trouble now," thought Penny anxiously.

A moment later, Louise, puffing and gasping, came running past. Penny joined her, grasping her hand to help her over the rough places.

"That man's right behind!" Louise panted. "Are we almost to the river?"

Penny did not discourage her by revealing that she had been running in the wrong direction. The chance of escape now was a slim one. Louise was nearly out of breath, while the man who pursued them, steadily gained.

"The ark!" Penny cried, guiding her chum. "We'll be safe there!"

Unmindful of thorns which tore at their clothing, the girls raced on. Although Carl Oaks had been left far behind, the other man was not to be outdistanced. He kept so close that Louise and Penny had no opportunity to hide or attempt to throw him off the trail.

"Go on, Penny," Louise gasped, slackening speed. "I can't make it."

"Yes, you can!" Penny fairly pulled her along. "We're almost there. See!"

The ark loomed up ahead. Encouraged by the sight, Louise gathered her strength and kept doggedly on. They reached the bank of the stream and gave way to despair. The ark was dark and the gangplank which usually connected it with shore, was nowhere in evidence.

"Noah! Noah!" called Louise wildly.

Only the parrot answered, crackling saucily from

a porthole: "Hello, Noah, you old soak! Where are you, Noah?"

Breathless and bewildered, the girls did not know what to do. Before they could turn and run on, the man who so ruthlessly pursued them, dashed out from among the trees.

"Oh, here you are," he said, and moonlight gleamed on the revolver he held in his hand. "A very pretty race, my dears, but shall we call this the finish line?"

CHAPTER

22

A SEARCHING PARTY

"NOW WE'LL have no more nonsense," said the man who held the revolver. "Stand over there against the tree."

Penny and Louise were so frightened that they trembled violently.

"You'll not be harmed if you do exactly as you're told," the waiter assured them.

"Why not let us go home?" Penny ventured, recovering her courage.

"Not tonight, my dear." The man smiled grimly. "Unfortunately, you have learned too much regarding my affairs."

"Then what are you going to do with us?" Penny demanded.

Apparently, the waiter did not himself know. While he guarded the girls, he cast a quick glance toward the ark. Just then running footsteps were heard in the woods, and someone whistled twice.

The waiter answered the signal. A moment later, Carl Oaks, quite winded, came into view.

"So you got 'em, eh?" he demanded with pleasure.

"The question is what to do with them."

"I don't want 'em at the shack," the old watchman complained. "When young Ottman comes around I may have my hands full with him."

"This ark should serve my purpose," the waiter muttered. "The old coot that lives here has gone off somewhere. Oaks, get aboard and look around."

"There's no way to cross to it," the watchman said helplessly.

"Find the gangplank!" his companion ordered irritably. "It must be hidden somewhere in the bushes."

Thus urged, Oaks searched along the river bank and soon came upon the missing plank. Fitting it into place, he quickly crossed to the ark. A dog started to bark, but the sound was choked off.

"Well?" called the waiter impatiently.

"No one here except the animals," Oaks reported, reappearing on deck. "The only room that can be locked off is the cabin where the dope keeps his birds."

"That ought to do," decided the waiter. "We won't have to keep 'em here long."

Penny and Louise were compelled to march across the gangplank, up the steps to the bird room of the

ark. The parrot, arousing from a doze, squawked a raucous welcome.

"Get in there and don't make any noise!" the waiter ordered. "If you shout for help or make any disturbance, you'll be bound and gagged. And that's not pleasant. Get me?"

"You seem to have got us," Penny retorted.

The door slammed and a bolt slid into place. Penny tiptoed at once to the porthole. It was much too small to permit an escape, but at least it provided fresh air and a view of the shore.

"Well, well, well," cackled the parrot, tramping up and down on his wide perch. "Polly wants a slug o' rum."

"You'll get a slug, period, if you don't keep quiet," Penny said crossly. "Give me a chance to think, will you?"

"Thinking won't get us out of this mess," murmured Louise, sitting down with her back to a wall. "It must be after nine o'clock now. If Bill had notified our folks, they would be looking for us long before this."

In whispers the girls discussed their unfortunate situation. They were hopeful that eventually they would be released, but they could not expect freedom until long after midnight.

"The Seventh Street Bridge will be blasted at one

o'clock," Penny said anxiously. "If it goes up, Riverview traffic will be paralyzed. Work at the munition plant will stop cold."

"The saboteurs intend to blame Burt Ottman for the job too! Well, at least we can tell police who the real plotters are."

"We can if we ever get out of here," Penny said, pacing the floor. "Oh, I'm as mad as a hornet!"

"Quiet down, and maybe we can hear something," Louise suggested calmly. "I think those men are talking."

A murmur of voices could be heard from the third floor of the ark. The partitions were thin. By standing on one of the pigeon boxes, the girls discovered they could understand nearly everything that was being said.

"Carl, you go back to the shack and keep an eye on Ottman," the waiter ordered the watchman. "As soon as Breneham comes, send him here. We'll pull the job at one o'clock just as we planned."

"Okay, Jard," the other answered.

Getting down from the pigeon box, Penny watched Carl Oaks leave the ark.

"How about taking a chance and shouting for help?" Louise suggested in a whisper.

Penny shook her head. "Not now at least. I doubt anyone is within a mile of this place—that is, anyone friendly to us."

The girls were not to enjoy their porthole for long. Within a few minutes the waiter tacked a strip of canvas over the opening. He then sat down on deck directly beneath it, and the odor of his cigar drifted into the room.

"That man must be Jard Wessler," Penny whispered to her chum. "You remember Bill said he was hired to work for a fellow by the name of Wessler."

"I don't care who he is," muttered Louise. "All *I* think about is getting out of here."

The girls sat side by side, their backs to the wall. About them in boxes and cages, Noah's birds stirred restlessly. Polly, the parrot, kept up such a chatter that at length Penny covered the cage with a sack.

Time passed slowly. It seemed hours later that Penny and Louise heard the sound of a man's voice. The cry, though low, came from shore.

"Ark ahoy! Are you there, Wessler?"

"Come aboard," invited the one in command of the boat. "Oaks told you what happened?"

"Yeah, and I have more bad news." The newcomer had reached the ark and his voice could be heard plainly by Louise and Penny. "A searching party is out looking for those two girls. Heading this way too."

"In that case—"

The door of the bird room suddenly was thrust open and a flashbeam focused upon the girls. They

found themselves confronted by Jard Wessler and a stranger. At least Penny's first thought was that she had never seen him before. Then it came to her that he closely resembled the man with whom Burt Ottman had dined at The Green Parrot.

Before either of the girls realized what was in store, they were seized by the arms. Tape was plastered over their lips, and their limbs were bound.

"A precautionary measure," Wessler assured them. "You'll be released soon."

Penny and Louise understood perfectly why they had been bound and gagged. Scarcely fifteen minutes elapsed before they heard the sound of men's voices along shore. Soon thereafter someone hailed the ark. Penny's heart leaped for she recognized her father's voice.

"Hello, the ark!" he shouted.

Wessler responded, his voice casual and friendly.

"We're looking for two girls lost in the woods. Have you see them?"

"Why, yes," Wessler answered. "A couple of girls went past here about an hour ago. They were on their way to the river."

"Then they must have started home," Mr. Parker replied, greatly relieved. "By the way, you're not the one they call Noah, are you?"

"Just a friend of his."

"I see," responded Mr. Parker, apparently satisfied

with the answer. "Well, thanks. We've been worried about my daughter and her friend. It's a relief to know they're on their way home."

In the dark bird room of the ark, Penny and Louise squirmed and twisted. Though they thumped their feet on the floor, the sound conveyed no hint of their plight to those on shore.

Mr. Parker called a cheery good night to Wessler. For a few minutes the girls heard the sound of retreating footsteps in the underbrush. Then all was still save for the restless stirring of the birds.

CHAPTER

23

HELP FROM NOAH

A LONG while later, Jard Wessler and his companion reentered the cabin where Penny and Louise were imprisoned. After removing the tape from the girls' lips, and freeing them of their uncomfortable bonds, they went outside again.

"At least they're not trying to torture us," Louise said, close to tears. "Oh, Penny, your father believes we've gone home! Now we'll never be found."

"Not in time to save the bridge, that's certain," her chum agreed gloomily.

Getting up from the floor, Penny groped her way to the covered porthole. She stumbled against a box and there was a loud tinkle of glass.

"Noah's bottles!" she exclaimed, exasperated. "Where do you suppose the old fellow has taken himself?"

"Maybe the sheriff got him."

"I doubt it," returned Penny. "He probably just went off somewhere."

After testing the cabin door, she sat down again beside Louise. The girls did not sleep but they fell into a drowsy, half-stupefied state. Then suddenly they were aroused by the sound of low voices just outside the porthole.

"It's an old man coming," they heard Wessler mutter. "Must be Noah."

"What'll we do with him?" the other demanded.

"Wait and see how he acts," Wessler advised. "He's such a simple old coot he may not suspect anything. If he makes trouble we'll have to lock him up."

A silence ensued and then the girls heard heavy footsteps on the gangplank.

"Ho, and who has visited my ark while I've been away?" muttered Old Noah.

Wessler and his companion, Breneham, stepped from the shadows.

"Good evening, Noah," the waiter greeted him politely. "Looks like rain, doesn't it?"

The remark concerning the weather was all that was needed to dull the old man's perceptions. Forgetting that the ark had been invaded by strangers during his absence, he lowered an armload of groceries to the railing, and peered intently up at the sky.

"No man knoweth the hour, but when the thunder of the Lord strikes, the rain will descend. All creatures of the earth shall perish—yes, all except those

who seek refuge here. Therefore, my sons, you do well to seek the shelter of my ark."

"The old fellow's sure raving," Wessler remarked to his companion.

"A raven?" inquired Noah, misunderstanding. "Ah, yes! For one hundred and fifty days the waters will prevail upon the earth. Then will I send forth a raven or a dove to search for a sprig of green. And if the bird returns with such a token, then shall I know that the waters are receding, no more to destroy all flesh."

"Toddle on, old man," Wessler said, growing irritated. "Where've you been anyway?"

"My burdens are heavy," Noah replied with a deep sigh. "All day I have labored, seeking food for my animals. Greens I cut for Bessie, my cow, and at the grocery store I bought seed for the birds, crackers—"

"Never mind," Wessler interrupted. "Go into your quarters and stay there."

"Bessie, the cow, must be fed."

"Then go feed her," Wessler snapped. "Just get out of my sight."

The girls could not hear what Old Noah said in reply. However, a medley of animal sounds beneath the deck, led them to believe that the master of the ark had gone into the lower part of the ship to care for his animals.

"I wish he'd come here," said Penny. "Maybe we could get the idea over to him that we're being held prisoners."

"Not a chance of it."

"Those men evidently intend to allow him the run of the ark so long as he suspects nothing," Penny mused. "Say, I know how we might bring him here!"

"How?"

"By stirring up the birds. Then Old Noah would get excited and try to break in."

"And what would that accomplish?"

"Probably nothing," Penny admitted, sighing. "Wessler is armed. Noah couldn't overpower two men, even if he were inclined to do it."

"All Noah thinks about is the coming flood. With another rain in the offing, he'll confine his worries to how he can attract more people to his ark."

"Lou! Maybe that's an idea!"

"What is?" Louise inquired blankly.

"Why, perhaps we can bring help by means of Old Noah and his message bottles!"

"Perhaps you know what you mean, but I am sure I don't!"

"Do you have a pen or a pencil with you, Lou?"

"I might have a pencil." Louise searched in the pockets of her jacket, and finally brought forth a stub with a broken lead.

"We can fix that so it will write," Penny declared, chewing away the wood.

"I still don't understand what you have in mind."

"This is my idea," Penny explained. "You know that whenever it rains Old Noah starts tossing message bottles into the river."

"True."

Penny groped her way across the room to the box which stood by the porthole. "Well, here are the bottles," she said triumphantly. "What's to prevent us from writing our own messages? We'll explain that we are held prisoners here and appeal for help."

"How do you propose to get the bottles overboard?"

"I'll think of a scheme."

"Even if the bottles did reach the water, one never would be picked up in time to do any good," Louise argued. "It's a bum idea, Penny."

"I guess it isn't so hot," Penny acknowledged ruefully. "Anyway, why not try it just to keep occupied? It's deadly sitting here and brooding."

"All right," Louise agreed.

The girls removed corks from several bottles and by means of a bent hairpin, removed the papers already inside them. Although they had no light, Penny and Louise scribbled at least a dozen messages. Carefully they recorked every bottle, replacing it in the box.

"I'm going to put my cameo pin inside this one," Penny said, unfastening a cherished ornament from her dress. "Someone might see it and open the bottle."

"We'll likely hear from it about next Christmas," her chum responded.

Becoming weary of writing messages, Penny decided to stir up a bit of action. Moving from box to box, she aroused the sleeping birds. Her final act was to jerk the covering from Polly's cage and playfully pluck the tail feathers of the startled creature.

"Noah! Noah!" the parrot croaked. "Heave out the anchor! Help! Help!"

"Keep it up, Polly," Penny encouraged, rocking the cage.

The parrot squawked in righteous rage and the other birds chirped excitedly. In the midst of the commotion, a heavy step was heard on deck. Noah, finding the door to the bird room locked, shook it violently.

"Unbolt this door!" he shouted. "Unlock it, I say, or I will break it down!" And he banged with his fists against the flimsy panel.

"What's coming off here?" demanded another voice, that of Wessler. "Have you gone completely crazy?"

"I want to know why this door is locked!" Noah said wrathfully. "Unlock it or I will break it down!"

Completely aroused, the old man backed away as if to make a running attack. Wessler drew his revolver, but Noah paid not the slightest heed.

"Let me get at my birds!" he cried. "Stand back!"

"Better humor him," Breneham said uneasily. "Unless you do, he'll arouse the countryside."

Wessler returned the revolver to its holster beneath his coat. "Calm down, Grandpa, calm down," he tried to soothe the old man. "No one is going to hurt your precious birds."

"Then open that door!"

"Go ahead," Wessler directed his companion. "If he makes any more trouble we'll lock him in with the girls."

"There are no doors on this ark strong enough to hold me," said Noah. "Open it I say!"

The command was obeyed. The old man stumbled across the threshold and began to murmur soothing words to the birds. At first he did not see Penny and Louise. Finally observing them, he spoke rather absently:

"Good evening, my daughters. I am happy that you have come again to my ark, but I am afraid you have disturbed my birds."

Penny chose her words carefully for Wessler and his pal stood in the cabin doorway.

"The birds do seem excited for some reason. No doubt they're alarmed by the approaching storm."

"Yes, yes, that may be it," Old Noah murmured. "And the porthole is covered. That should not be. I will fix it."

Pushing past the two men, Old Noah went outside the cabin to jerk away the canvas covering. He came back in a moment, bearing a sack of bird seed.

"Upstairs!" Wessler tersely ordered the girls.

In crossing the room, Penny deliberately stumbled against the box of blue corked bottles.

"With another storm coming up, I suppose you'll be throwing out more of your messages," she said jokingly to Noah.

Penny had hoped that the suggestion might presently cause the old man to dump the contents of the box into the water. She neither expected nor desired that he would attempt the task in the presence of the two saboteurs. However, Old Noah immediately dropped the sack of bird seed and strode over to the box of bottles.

"Yes, yes, I have been neglectful of my duty," he murmured. "With the Great Flood coming, I must warn the good people of Riverview. I shall bid them seek refuge here before their doom is sealed."

Old Noah selected a half dozen bottles and started to heave them through the porthole. Before he could do so, Wessler blocked the opening.

"Just a minute, Grandpa," he said. "What's in those bottles?"

"Messages which I wrote with my own hand," Old Noah replied earnestly. "Would you like to read them, my son?"

"That's exactly what I intend to do," said Wessler.

With a suspicious glance directed at Penny and Louise, he reached into the box and selected one of the corked bottles.

CHAPTER

24

A MESSAGE IN THE BOTTLE

FAILING EASILY to retrieve the message in the bottle, Jard Wessler smashed it against a wall of the ark. Picking up the folded paper, he flashed his light across the writing.

" 'The hour of the Great Deluge approaches,' " he read aloud. " 'Come to my ark and I will provide shelter and comfort.' "

Penny and Louise relaxed. The message was one that Old Noah had written. Unless Wessler opened another bottle he would not suspect that they were the authors of other messages pleading for help.

"Stand back and allow me to throw my bottles into the stream!" Old Noah cried angrily. "Even though you are a guest aboard my ark, your actions are not pleasing."

"Go ahead, Grandpa," Wessler said with a shrug. "Heave out your bottles if it will keep you happy."

As Old Noah began to toss the bottles out of the

porthole, Wessler again ordered Penny and Louise from the cabin.

"Upstairs!" he said, giving them a shove toward the stairway.

Penny glanced quickly toward shore. The gangplank had been raised, but the distance was not great.

As if reading her mind, Wessler said: "I wouldn't try to make a leap for it if I were you, little lady. Behave yourself, and you'll be set free before morning."

Penny and Louise were forced to go upstairs to the third floor of the ark. Although Old Noah's living quarters were more comfortable than the bird room, they provided less privacy. Wessler and his companion remained on the floor, and not a word could the girls speak without being overheard.

Old Noah soon appeared. In a much better mood, he chatted with the two men. Finding them uncommunicative, he picked up his banjo and began to sing spirituals to its accompaniment. His voice, as cracked as the fingers which strummed the strings, drove Breneham into a near frenzy.

"There's a limit to what a guy can stand," he said meaningly to Wessler.

"It won't be much longer now," the other encouraged, glancing at his watch.

"Why can't we pull the job now and get out?"

"Because the car won't be waiting for us. Everything's got to move on schedule."

As the night wore on, a light rain began to fall. Wessler and his companion went frequently to the windows, seemingly well pleased by the change of weather.

The ordeal of waiting was a cruel one for Louise and Penny. Although they knew that Old Noah had tossed their messages into the water, they held scant hope that any of the bottles would be found that night. While searching parties might continue to seek them, it was unlikely that they would be released in time to prevent the destruction of the Seventh Street Bridge.

Another hour elapsed. Wessler looked at his watch and spoke to his companion.

"Well, I'm shoving off! When you hear the explosion, lock 'em up in the bird room, and make for the shack. The car will pick you up."

"Good luck, Jard," Breneham responded.

Wessler went out the door, closing it behind him. The girls heard him lower the gangplank into place, and then his footsteps died away.

Penny gazed at Louise in despair. They both knew that Jard Wessler had gone to dynamite the Seventh Street Bridge. Although they were not certain of the plan, they believed that he intended to use Sara Ott-

man's boat which doubtlessly would be loaded with explosives.

Breneham began to pace the floor nervously. Suddenly he halted by a porthole, listening. The girls too strained to hear.

"Someone's out there in the trees!" Breneham muttered. "This ark is being watched! Noah, stick your head out the window and ask who it is! And no tricks!"

Old Noah did as ordered.

"Hello, the ark!" shouted a voice which Penny thought belonged to Jerry Livingston. "Are you alone there, Noah?"

"Tell him yes," prodded the saboteur. "Say that you are just going to bed."

"But my son, that would be a base falsehood," Noah argued. "I have no intention of retiring—"

Penny, quick to divine that Breneham's attention was diverted, rushed to another window. In a shrill voice she screamed for help.

Breneham sprang toward Penny, intending to fell her with a blow. Louise began to shout. Realizing that he had been betrayed, Breneham jerked open the door and leaped from the high deck into the stream.

"Get him! Get him!" shouted Penny to the group of men on shore.

Breneham swam a few feet and then waded toward the far side of the stream.

"Oh, he's going to get away!" Louise murmured, watching anxiously from a porthole.

As the saboteur scrambled up the bank, two men rose from their hiding places in the tall bushes and grasped him by the arms.

"It's Dad!" cried Penny gleefully. "And your father too, Louise!"

Thrilled by the manner in which their release had been accomplished, the girls ran out of the cabin. Crossing the gangplank, they saw that the rescue party was comprised of Mr. Parker, Mr. Sidell, Jerry Livingston, several men who were strangers, and Sara Ottman.

"I found your message in the bottle!" she greeted the girls excitedly.

"Not really?" demanded Penny.

"I was in the little cove just below here, guarding my boat," explained Sara. "I intended to get back earlier to relieve you girls, but I was detained at the police station. Anyway, while I waited at the bend, wondering what to do, a swarm of corked bottles came floating downstream."

"Old Noah threw out a box full of them," chuckled Louise. "So you read our message, asking for help, Sara?"

The older girl nodded. "Yes, one of the bottles drifted ashore. Usually I don't bother to read the message, but this time I did."

"How were you able to bring help here so quickly?" asked Penny.

"Actually I didn't. Although I didn't realize it until a few minutes ago, your parents have been dreadfully worried about you girls. When Bill Evans telephoned them, they came here to search."

"I know," nodded Penny. "Dad was here earlier in the evening. The saboteurs tricked him into leaving."

"I didn't see him at the time," Sara resumed her explanation. "Penny, your father returned home, but when he learned you were not there, he organized a searching party. Just as the men reached Bug Run once more, I found your message. I gave it to Mr. Parker and—well, you know the rest."

"Did you capture Jard Wessler?" Penny demanded tensely. "That's the important thing!"

"Wessler? You mean the man who stole my motorboat?"

"Yes, he went away from the ark about five minutes ago. I'm sure he intended to use the hidden boat, Sara! You left it well guarded, I hope."

"There's no one watching it now."

"Then we've got to move fast!" Penny cried, looking anxiously about for her father. "Jard Wessler plans to destroy the Seventh Street Bridge! He's probably close by now, waiting for a chance to make his get-away!"

The three girls ran to meet Mr. Parker who at that moment had crossed the stream with the prisoner. Just then the engine of a motorboat was heard to sputter. Sara stopped short, listening. Unmistakably, the sound came from around the bend.

"That's my boat!" Sara cried.

"Jard Wessler is getting away!" Penny added. "We must stop him!"

Leaving others to guard the prisoner, Mr. Parker and Jerry ran toward the mouth of Bug Run. Not to be left behind, Penny, Sara, and Louise, followed as fast as they could. By the time they reached the river, Wessler's boat had disappeared. However, the popping of its engine could be heard far out on the water.

"We'll never overtake him now," Sara said despairingly. "That boat is a fast one."

A slower craft, one the girl had used earlier in the evening to cross the river, was beached nearby. Even though pursuit seemed useless, the men launched it. Overloaded with five passengers, the boat made slow progress against the current.

"We haven't a chance to overtake that fellow," Sara repeated again.

"If only we could notify Coast Guards!" Penny murmured hopelessly. "Their station is up river. They still might be able to intercept Wessler before he reaches the bridge."

"No way to contact them," Mr. Parker responded, his voice grim. "If there were any houses along shore, we could telephone. As it is, the situation is pretty hopeless."

"Shall we give up the chase?" asked Sara who handled the tiller.

As Mr. Parker hesitated, Penny suddenly grasped his arm. To the starboard she had glimpsed an approaching yacht. Its contour was so well known along the waterfront that she had no doubt as to its identity—the *Eloise III.*

"Dad, we still have a chance!" she cried. "By radio telephone!"

"How d'you mean?" he demanded.

"The *Eloise* has a radio telephone!" Penny explained. Excitedly, she began to signal with Sara's flashlight. "Dad, if only they see us in time, we still may save the bridge!"

CHAPTER

25

A BOW IN THE CLOUD

IN THE radio room of the *Eloise III*, Mr. Parker, Jerry, and the three girls hovered at the elbow of Commodore Phillips who sat at the radio-telephone.

"I've done all I can," the Commodore said, putting aside the instrument. "The Coast Guard station has acknowledged our message. Now we must wait."

The *Eloise* which had picked up Mr. Parker's party, was heading at full steam toward the Seventh Street Bridge. Unmindful of the rain, the young people went out on deck. Huddling in the lee of the cabin, they anxiously watched and listened.

"It's one fifteen," said Mr. Parker, glancing at his watch. "Any minute now—"

A loud report sounded over the water.

"The bridge!" gasped Louise. "It's been dynamited!"

"No, no!" exclaimed the Commodore impatiently. "That was gunfire! The Coast Guard boat has gone into action!"

A moment later those aboard the *Eloise* saw a flash of fire and heard another loud report.

"You may rest easy now," said the Commodore, relaxing. "With the Coast Guard on the job, that saboteur hasn't a chance. If he escapes with his life he'll be lucky."

Penny sagged weakly against the railing of the *Eloise*. Now that she knew the bridge would be saved, she felt completely exhausted from the long period of suspense.

"Wessler can't be the only one involved in this plot," she heard her father say. "There must be others."

"Oh, there are!" Penny cried, recovering her strength. "Carl Oaks is a member of the outfit! He's waiting at a shack not far from the ark. And Burt Ottman is held a prisoner there!"

"Burt!" Sara exclaimed in horror. "Oh, why didn't you tell me!"

"In the excitement it just passed out of my mind," Penny confessed. "I forgot about everything except saving the bridge!"

Once more Commodore Phillips busied himself on the radio telephone, this time contacting Riverview police. Before he left his desk he learned that a squad had been dispatched to the shack in the woods. Likewise, a message soon came from the Coast Guard

station, informing him that Jard Wessler had been captured.

"Oh, I can't wait to see Burt," Sara declared, anxiously pacing the deck. "He may be seriously hurt."

To ease the girl's mind, Commodore Phillips put the entire party ashore not far from the entrance to Bug Run. Hastening through the woods, Mr. Parker and the young people reached the shack only a few minutes after the arrival of police.

"What became of Carl Oaks?" the newspaper owner asked a sergeant. "Did you get him?"

The policeman indicated a downcast figure who sat handcuffed inside the patrol car. Oaks, he explained, had been captured without a struggle.

"And Burt Ottman?" Mr. Parker inquired.

"They're taking him to the ambulance now."

Four men came out of the shack bearing the injured young man on a stretcher. Pale but conscious, he grinned as Sara tearfully bent over him.

"I'm okay, Sis," he mumbled. "Feelin' swell."

Sara was allowed to ride with her brother to the hospital. Remaining behind, Mr. Parker, Jerry and the girls, tried to learn from police officers if Burt had made any statement.

"Sure, he was able to spill the whole story," one of the men told them. "Seems he set out to prove that he was innocent of any association with the saboteurs.

Instead of cooperating with police, he went to work on his own. He investigated an organization known as the American Protective Society. That put him on the trail of a head waiter at The Green Parrot, a foreigner by the name of Jard Wessler."

"I understand now why Burt acted so queer about that billfold he lost along the river," Penny commented. "He didn't want me to know that he was meeting one of the saboteurs at the Parrot."

"How many were involved in the dynamiting plot?" Mr. Parker asked.

"Twelve or thirteen. According to Ottman, Jard Wessler is the brains of the group. By pretending to go along with them, the kid gathered a lot of evidence."

"But at first the saboteurs tried to throw the guilt on Burt," Penny protested.

"True," nodded the policeman. "They used a boat stolen from the Ottman dock, and they planted evidence to make it appear that Burt was the guilty one."

"Then why would they take up with him later?" Penny asked in perplexity.

"They never did. One of the saboteurs met him at The Green Parrot to try to learn how much the kid knew. Young Ottman was slugged over the head when he tried to get into a basement room where the gang held their meetings."

"I guess that explains why we found Burt lying

outside in the alley," Mr. Parker remarked. "It's a pity he couldn't have told us what he was attempting to do."

"The kid did get a lot of evidence," resumed the officer. "With the information he's given us, we expect to mop up the entire gang."

"Louise and I found him a prisoner here at the shack," Penny remarked slowly. "I suppose in seeking evidence, he tangled with the saboteurs again."

"Yes, young Ottman was foolhardy. He was caught spying a second time and they slugged him. Lucky for him his injuries aren't likely to prove serious."

Mr. Parker and Jerry asked many more questions, knowing the story would rate important play in the *Riverview Star*. Turning Penny and Louise over to Mr. Sidell who belatedly joined the party, the two newspaper men rushed off to scoop rival papers.

"Dad didn't even take time to say he was glad we escaped from those saboteurs!" Penny complained to Louise. "Isn't that a newspaper man for you!"

Before another hour had elapsed, reporters and photographers from other papers swarmed the woods. Louise and Penny were quizzed regarding the capture of the three saboteurs. Determined that the *Star* should print an exclusive story, they had very little to say.

Hours later, at home, Penny learned that police

had lost no time in acting upon information provided by Burt Ottman. The entire group of men known to be associated with Jard Wessler had been arrested at a Fourteenth Street club. A complete confession had been signed by Carl Oaks who claimed that he was not a member of the gang, but had been hired to do as instructed.

"Well, the *Star* scooped every paper in town," Mr. Parker remarked, as he put aside the front page. "That's not important, however, compared to saving the Seventh Street Bridge."

"How about your daughter?" Penny asked, rumpling his hair. "Aren't you one speck glad about saving me?"

"I've been reserving a special lecture for you," he said, pretending to be stern. "Young ladies who go running about at night—"

"Never mind," laughed Penny, "If Lou and I hadn't done our prowling, I guess you wouldn't have any old Seventh Street Bridge!"

Actually Mr. Parker was very proud of his daughter and showed it in many ways. He would not allow Mrs. Weems to scold her for the night's escapade. Learning that she was worried about Old Noah, he promised to talk to Sheriff Anderson and do what he could for the old fellow. The next morning, he and Penny started off to see Noah, stopping enroute at the hospital.

"Oh, I'm so glad you came!" Sara Ottman greeted them at her brother's bedside. "Burt and I owe you so much. I've been very unpleasant—"

"Not at all," corrected Penny. "Anyway, I like folks who aren't afraid to speak their minds."

From Burt Ottman, Mr. Parker and his daughter heard a story much like the one previously told them by the police. The young man rapidly had gained in strength and was much cheered because he had been cleared in connection with the bridge dynamitings.

"How did you learn that Jard Wessler was a saboteur?" Mr. Parker asked him.

"Accident," admitted Burt. "Even before the bridge was blasted, I had seen the fellow around the docks. One day I overheard him talking to Breneham, and what they said made me suspicious. After getting involved in the mess myself, I made it my business to investigate. I managed to meet one of the saboteurs at the Parrot, but he proved too shrewd for me."

"You woke up in the alley," Penny recalled.

"Yes, after that I watched a place I'd learned about on Fourteenth Street. Figured I had all the dope. But as I started for the police, someone hit me with a blackjack. That's the last I remember until I came to at the woods shack."

Penny and her father were pleased to know that the young man was recovering from his injuries.

After chatting with him for a time, they left the hospital and proceeded toward the ark in the mud flats.

"I confess I don't know what to say to Noah," Mr. Parker declared as they approached the gangplank. "Sheriff Anderson insists the ark is a nuisance and must go."

Penny paused at the edge of the stream. It had started to rain once more, and drops splattered down through the trees, rippling the quiet water.

"Poor Noah!" she sighed. "He'll be unwilling to leave his home or his animals. This ark never can be floated either."

"I'll be glad to pay for his lodging elsewhere," Mr. Parker offered. "Naturally, he'll have to forsake his pets."

Crossing the gangplank, Penny called Old Noah's name. There was no answer. Not until she had shouted many times did the old fellow come up from the ark's hold. His arms were grimy, his clothing wet from the waist down.

"Why, Noah!" Penny exclaimed, astonished by his appearance.

"All morning I have labored," the old fellow said wearily. "The commotion last night excited Bess, my cow. The critter kicked a hole in the ark. Water has poured in faster than I can pump it out."

"Well, why not abandon this old boat?" Mr. Parker proposed, quick to seize an opportunity. "Wouldn't you like to live in a steam-heated apartment?"

"With my animals?"

"No, you would have to leave them behind."

Old Noah shook his head. "I could not desert my animals. At least not my dogs and cats, or my birds or fowls. As for cows and goats, they are a burden almost beyond my strength."

"A little place in the country might suit you," suggested Penny brightly. As Noah showed no interest, she added: "Or how would you like a big bus? You could take your smaller pets and tour the United States!"

Old Noah's dull blue eyes began to gleam. "I had a truck once," he said. "They took it away from me after I had made a payment. I've always hankered to see the country. But it's not to be."

"Oh, a truck might be arranged," declared Penny, grinning at her father.

"It's not that." Old Noah leaned heavily on the railing of the ark. "You might say I made a covenant to keep this place of refuge. The Great Flood soon will be upon us—"

"There will be no flood," interrupted Mr. Parker impatiently.

"I'd be happy to leave this ark if only I could be-

lieve that," sighed Noah. "I'm getting older, and it's a great burden to care for so many animals. But I must not shirk my duty because I am tired."

Penny knew that the old man could not be influenced by mere words. Glancing at the sky, she saw that although rain still fell, the sun had straggled through the clouds. Above the trees arched a beautiful rainbow.

"Noah!" she cried, directing his attention to it. "Don't you remember the Bible quotation: 'And I do set my bow in the cloud and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.' "

" 'And the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh,' " Noah whispered, his fascinated gaze upon the rainbow.

"There, you have your sign, your token," Mr. Parker said briskly.

"Yes, yes," whispered the old man. "This is the hour for which I long have waited! Behold the rainbow which rolleth back the scroll of destiny! Never again will the flood come. Never again will destruction envelop the earth and all its creatures."

"How about it Noah?" Mr. Parker asked impatiently. "If I make all arrangements will you leave the ark?"

The old man did not hesitate. "Yes, I will go," he said. "My mission here is finished. I am content."

Penny and her father did not annoy the old man

with material details, but slipped quietly away from the ark. Glancing back, they saw that Noah still stood at the railing, his face turned raptly toward the fading rainbow. As the last trace of color disappeared from the sky, he bowed his head in worshipful reverence. A moment he stood thus, and then, turning, walked with dignity into the ark.

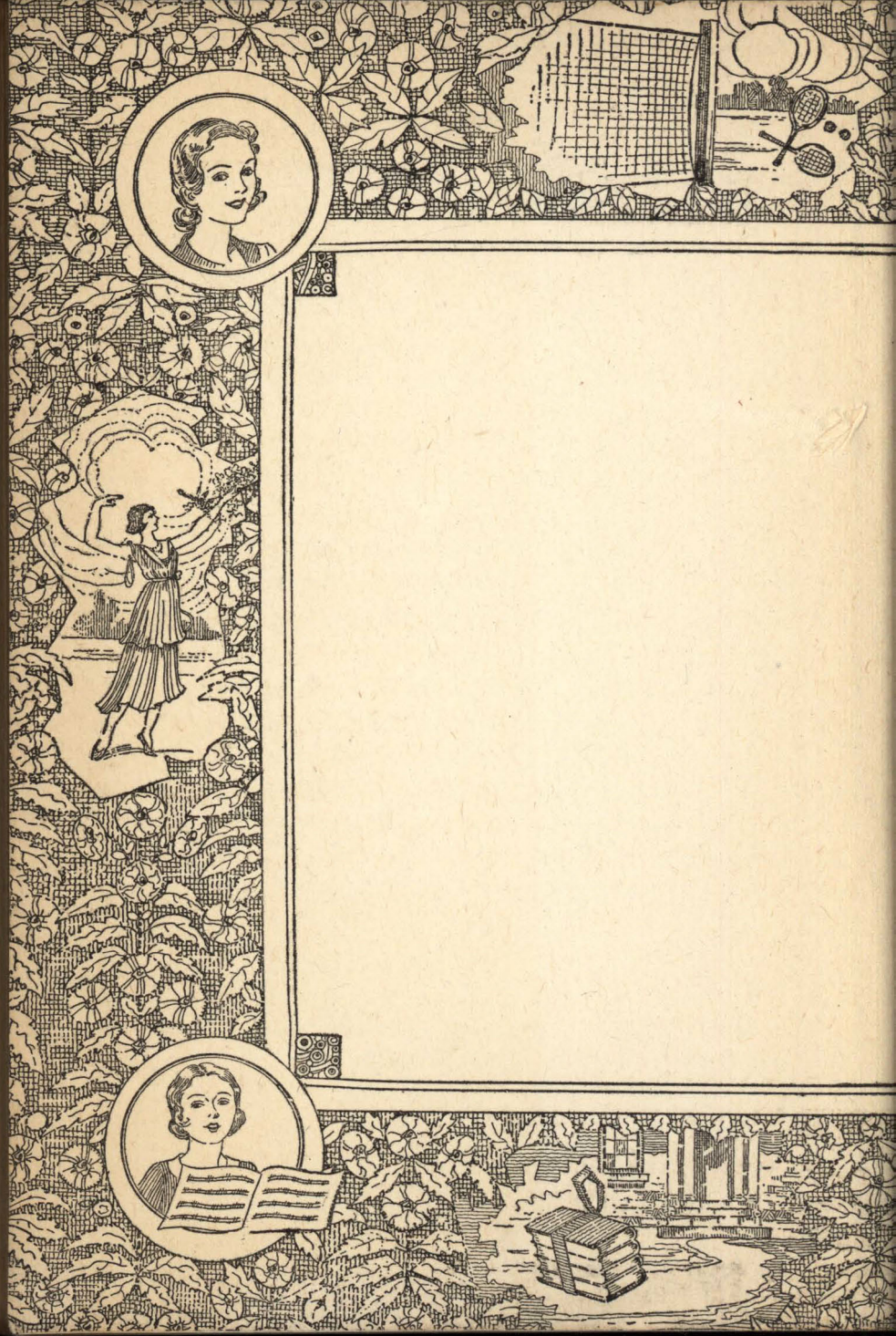
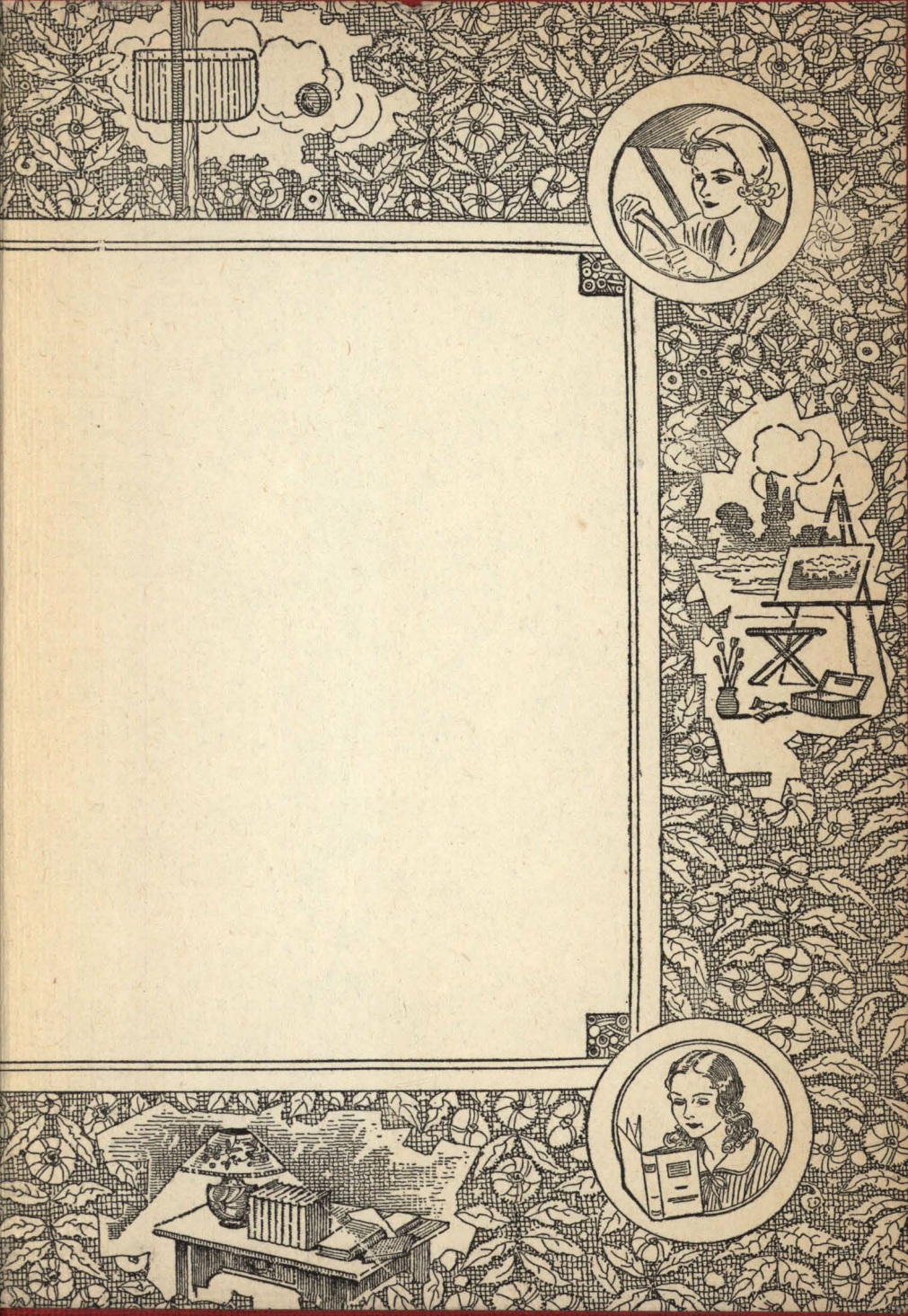
"Poor old fellow," said Penny.

"I suppose you mean Noah," chuckled Mr. Parker. "But I deserve sympathy too. Haven't I just been knicked to the tune of an expensive truck?"

"You don't really mind, do you, Dad?"

"No, it's worth it to have the old fellow satisfied," Mr. Parker responded. "And then, the ark brought me a big story for the *Star*."

Penny walked silently beside her father. With the saboteurs in jail, Burt Ottman free, and Old Noah's future settled, she had not a worry in the world. Rounding a bend of the stream, she glimpsed a shining blue bottle caught in the backwash of a fallen log. Eagerly she started to rescue it.

"Don't tell me you expect to collect every one of those messages!" protested Mr. Parker.

"Every single one," laughed Penny, raking in the bottle. "You see, last night I lost a very pretty cameo pin. Until I find it, I'll never admit that the case of the saboteurs is closed!"